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## Beliefs of Our Fathers: The End Times

## Chapter 9—Final

This concludes a study on the beliefs of our forefathers, based largely on the 1632 Dordrecht Confession of Faith. This section tells about Eschatology, or the study of the end times. This has been edited for space.

### The End Times

#### Eschatology

*“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh”* (Matthew 24:42-44).

#### Introduction

We now come to the concluding message of the Bible – the Revelation of Jesus Christ. The book of Revelation is the fulfilment of God’s plan for mankind which began in Genesis. Every book in the Bible is important for our spiritual growth, though Genesis is the foundation for understanding the whole Bible, and

Revelation shows us where we’re headed. It is the crowning moment of joy for God the Father, when His Son receives and presents His bride, the Church, to Him. It is the glorious conclusion of salvation to all those who have responded to the call of God by repentance and faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Son.

There are many mysteries God has chosen not to tell us, yet here in Revelation, He graciously lets us know what is to come at the end of time, so we can be prepared for the future. Take a look at Psalm 103 and read the comforting promises made to those who fear God. To fear Him is to believe His every word and dedicate your life to serving Him. Fearing God in this life will give us confidence in the next.

While teaching in an Amish school, I was warned by the bishop never to mention the book of Revelation in morning devotions. Sadly, it is a book that is widely ignored by most religions because of its seemingly strange and fearful happenings which they cannot understand. It should be fearful to those who do not have faith in Jesus Christ,

and it should turn them from trusting anything else for their salvation. God has revealed to us many clear signs to warn us of the coming end, which we will discuss in this chapter. He has told us what to look for so that Christians will not lose heart but will remain diligent in serving Christ until He comes. Matthew 24 says to *“watch . . . and be ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”*

#### What the Anabaptists Teach

Since groups of Amish believers differ from one another, what is held as true for one group can be different for another group. However, it is interesting to note that when it comes to the end of the world, almost all Amish share the same view.

The clearest Amish viewpoint on the end times comes from the *Dordrecht Confession of Faith*. It is composed of eighteen articles, the last of which speaks of the end of the world, under the heading, “Of the Resurrection of the Dead, and the Last Judgment.” It states:

“Finally, concerning the resurrection of the dead, we confess with the mouth, and

believe with the heart, according to Scripture, that in the last day all men who shall have died, and fallen asleep, shall be awaked and quickened [brought to life], and shall rise again, through the incomprehensible power of God; and that they, together with those who then will still be alive, and who shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye, at the sound of the last trump, shall be placed before the judgment seat of Christ, and the good be separated from the wicked; that then everyone shall receive in his own body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or evil; and that the good or pious, as the blessed, shall be taken up with Christ, and shall enter into life eternal, and obtain that joy, which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, to reign and triumph with Christ forever and ever. Matthew 22:30-31; Daniel 12:12; Job 19:26-27; Matthew 25:31; John 5:28; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 20:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:15; 1 Corinthians 2:9.

“And that, on the other hand, the wicked or impious, as accursed, shall be cast into outer darkness, yea, into the everlasting pains of hell, where their worm shall not die, nor their fire be quenched, and where they, according to holy Scripture, can nevermore expect any hope, comfort, or redemption. Mark 9:44; Revelation 14:11.”

This view is common in many churches today, and while much of it is scriptural, it leaves out some issues and topics raised elsewhere in the Scriptures. It is a general view of the end times, and it behooves us to know more about what will happen in

the end.

While the *Dordrecht Confession of Faith* does not say it specifically, history attests that the Amish view is a preterist view of the book of Revelation. That means they believe Revelation speaks mostly about events that have happened after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the first century, and does not address much of what will happen after Christ returns for the Church. When it comes to the millennium (the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth), the historic position of the Amish has always been amillennialism, which is natural for those who believe in preterism. Millennialism is the belief that Christ will reign on earth with the saints for a thousand years prior to the final judgment. Amillennialism, on the other hand, is the rejection of that belief.

### What the Scriptures Teach

We will take a broad approach that looks at what we should watch for, know about, and be ready for, relating to the return of Christ, and offer Scripture verses for further study on your own.

### Be Watchful and Ready

In chapter 24 of Matthew, Jesus is talking to His disciples as they overlook Jerusalem. They pointed to the temple buildings, and He told them there would come a time when not one stone would be left upon another.

Following this, His disciples came to Him privately to ask when these things would take place and “*what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?*” (Matthew 24:3). Before He got

into the details, He told them to take heed that no man deceive you, because many would be deceived (Matthew 24:4). The disciples wanted to know what to watch for, and Jesus warned them not to be deceived. This is also a warning for us to be watchful and to carefully search the Scriptures so as not to be deceived.

### We Live in the End Times

Often people tend to limit their concept of “end times” to the end of the world, but humanity has actually lived in the end times for almost 2,000 years. Hebrews 1:2 confirms this: “*[God] Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.*” While we don’t know the exact time the book of Hebrews was written, we do know it was sometime after Christ’s ascension and sometime before the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70), because the temple was still standing. Here are some more signs the apostles were told to watch for in Matthew 24:

*“For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. Ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in diverse places”* (Matthew 24:5-7).

Luke 21:11 also mentions earthquakes and says that “*fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven.*”

While we could easily compile a book on

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this verse alone, let's just use earthquakes to put things into perspective. The United States Geological Survey estimates "several million earthquakes occur in the world each year. Many go undetected because they hit remote areas or have very small magnitudes. The National Earthquake Information Center now locates about 50 earthquakes each day or about 20,000 a year." In a 2014 interview with *Live Science*, Thorne Lay, a professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz, pointed out an increase in larger quakes saying, "Between 1900 and 2004, the average yearly rate of quakes of magnitude 8 and larger was 0.65. In the past 10 years, that rate jumped to 1.8 – an increase of almost a factor of 3. But only the biggest quakes are becoming more frequent. There isn't a similar rise in smaller earthquakes."

Matthew 24:8 says that "*all these are the beginning of sorrows,*" and John 16:21 further compares all of these things to birth pangs: "*A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.*" Just as a woman in labor knows the baby is on the way, when Christians see these things come about with growing intensity, we know the Lord's coming is nearer. And just like birth pangs end when the baby is born and the mother welcomes her child with joy, we will be filled with joy when He arrives.

Descriptions and signs of the end times are sprinkled throughout Scripture. Luke 21:25 states: "*And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring.*" But the signs of the end times aren't limited to natural events and happenings. Signs will also be evident in society.

In the end times people will become evil

like in the days of Noah, when "*they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark*" (Mtt 24:37-38). In 2 Timothy 3:1-5, the apostle Paul says people will "*be lovers of their own selves, covetous [lovers of money] . . . lovers of pleasures, and will be boasters, proud, and unholy.*" Children will be disobedient to parents. In 1 Timothy 4:1, we learn "*that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.*" These earthly catastrophes and behaviors of people will be common in the end times.

## The Rapture

Not all Christians believe there will be a rapture, but many do. The rapture idea was popularized in the 1830s. The term refers to a snatching up to heaven of true Christians while they are still alive, along with those who have already died. In the rapture, it is said that Jesus will come in the air and catch up the Church from the earth. Those in Christ will be physically raised into the skies, given new bodies free of aging, disease, and sin and taken home to heaven as they are. In Matthew 24:36, Jesus said no one will know the day or the hour – not even the angels. Only God knows. Views on the timing of the rapture differ, but the one thing they have in common is that they are believed to happen around the time of the Great Tribulation.

Pre-tribulation rapture: The pre-tribulation view places the rapture before the seven years of the Great Tribulation. In Revelation 4:1, John sees an open door in heaven and hears a voice like a trumpet, which says, "*Come up hither.*" After this point, the church is not mentioned.

Mid-tribulation rapture: This view says the rapture occurs midway through the seven years of Great Tribulation, when the two prophets ascend to heaven (Revelation 11:11-12).

Post-tribulation rapture: This view places the rapture at the end of the seven vial judgments (Revelation 16:17-21).

The rapture theory is based on the following Scriptures:

*"And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come"* (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

*"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

*"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words"* (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

## The Great Tribulation

*"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be"* (Matthew 24:21).

The Bible clearly speaks of a great tribulation. This time of trouble and distress will occur just prior to the return of Christ for His 1,000-year reign on earth. Based on the forty-two months mentioned in Revelation 13:5 "*and a time and times and the dividing of time*" in the prophecy found in Daniel 7:25, the tribulation will last for seven years. For those who want to do the math, plenty of information is available to help you reach the same conclusion. This seven-year period will be a time so severe that "*except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened*" (Matthew 24:22).

The book of Revelation describes this as a time

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when God's wrath is poured out on the world that has rejected Him. Judgments are depicted in the seven seals (Revelation 6:1-17), seven trumpets (Revelation 8:6-13; 11:15-19), and seven bowls/vials (Revelation 16:1-21). All this culminates in what is known as the battle of Armageddon, when the Lord returns and comes against those who have rejected Him.

The following are other Bible verses that relate to the great tribulation:

*"And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time"* (Daniel 12:1).

*"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. . . Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken"* (Matthew 24:21, 29).

*"But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light"* (Mark 13:24).

## The Antichrist and Mark of the Beast

*"Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time"* (1 John 2:18).

*"And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion; and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was*

*healed; and all the earth wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him? And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. If any man have an ear, let him hear"* (Revelation 13:2-9).

The definition of *antichrist* is a person or force seen as opposing Christ or the Christian Church. And while today, just as in John's day, we have many antichrists in the world, the Bible tells us of one man who will rise to power as an irresistible leader. He will be *the Antichrist* – a fine speaking, delightful, persuasive, and easy-to-like man with much military know-how who will say he brings peace, but it will be a false peace. Even though the Bible doesn't tell us exactly who the Antichrist is, the Scriptures are very clear regarding his traits and characteristics, as well as what he will do once he has the power.

In Revelation 13:3, we see that people will follow this Antichrist, and Daniel 8:23-24 tells us more about the man to whom people will be flocking: *"And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall*

*destroy the mighty and the holy people."* The *dark sentences* refer to his involvement with occult mysteries. In short, he will be filled with satanic power and will be able to do the works of Satan *"with all power and signs and lying wonders"* (2 Thessalonians 2:9).

Scripture also tells us where the Antichrist comes from. Unlike the true Christ, he is a Gentile who rises from the old Roman Empire. In Daniel 9:26, the Antichrist is referred to as *"the prince that shall come"*, and he will require people to worship him and to take the mark on their hand or forehead as his follower. Without this mark, *"no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name"* (Revelation 13:17).

However, God's Word warns that *"if any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb"* (Revelation 14:9-10). Those who won't accept the mark of the beast will face martyrdom. *"These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb"* (Revelation 7:14).

The following are other Bible verses that describe the Antichrist:

*"And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings.*

*And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time"* (Dan 7:24-25).

*“And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate”* (Daniel 9:27).

*“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God”* (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4).

*“And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority”* (Revelation 13:1-2).

## Return of Christ

At the end of Revelation 19, we see that Jesus comes, riding a white horse. Verse 11 says the rider’s name is *“Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.”* When he returns, the armies of heaven follow Him upon white horses, clothed in fine, white linen (verse 14). A sharp sword comes from his mouth (verse 15). A sword is an instrument that divides, and this is the judgment of the nations (verse 15). John gave us the big picture, while Jesus gave us specifics regarding this judgment in the parable of the sheep and the goats. *“And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats”* (Matthew 25:32). He separates the sheep from the goats.

The sheep enter the thousand-year kingdom where Jesus reigns from Jerusalem as King. The goats are killed by the sword that comes from His mouth. When the Jews see Him, *“they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn”* (Zechariah 12:10). This is also the time when the Antichrist (also known as the beast) and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire, and Satan is bound and thrown into the bottomless pit for a thousand years.

This judgment is also depicted in Christ’s parable of the wheat and the tares, showing that at the end of the tribulation all unbelievers will be judged for their sin and unbelief. They will be removed from the presence of God, while believers will reign with Him in His earthly kingdom. *“Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn”* (Matthew 13:30). The disciples did not understand this parable, so after Jesus sent the multitudes away, they asked Him to explain:

*“He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.*

*As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*

*Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father”* (Matthew 13:37-43).

## The Thousand-Year Reign (Messianic Kingdom)

Following the battle of Armageddon, Christ will set up His kingdom here on earth and occupy the throne of David (Acts 2:29-30). The messianic kingdom is populated by the Lord’s people. In Revelation 20:4, we see them seated on thrones and judgment is given to them. *“And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”*

Over the thousand years, the people living in the kingdom will still have a choice of whether or not to believe in their King. Even though He reigns here on earth from Jerusalem, some people will still choose to reject Him and will come against Him at the end of the thousand years, when Satan is let out of the pit for one last time to gather the nations against Him:

*“And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.*

*And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.*

*And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone,*

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where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:7-10).

Satan will gather a large army and surround the city of God, but fire will come down and consume them, and the devil who deceived them will be thrown into the lake of fire to be tormented forever.

## Great White Throne Judgment

“And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it. . . . And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Revelation 20:11–12).

The great white throne judgment is the judgment of the unbelieving dead, meaning they have not been regenerated with the life God offered them through Jesus. Their works will mean nothing to God, because Christ was not in them (Matthew 7:21–23). In fact, it appears that the lost will be judged based on their evil works, and a worse damnation given to the worst.

This is the destruction of everything corrupted by sin. Even the earth and the heaven will flee from His presence, because at the end of this judgment, there is a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 20:11; 21:1).

“Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:24–26).

## Judgment Seat of Christ

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

The judgment seat of Christ is different from the great white throne judgment. The judgment seat is for rewards, much like we see at the Olympic games as participants are judged on their performance and rewarded for how well they do. In this case, only those in the body of Christ are judged. This is the judgment of the believers’ works, not to determine where they spend eternity, but whether they receive rewards for their works. *Good works* refer to what we do for Christ under the Holy Spirit’s power. First Corinthians 3:13–15 says that our works will be shown for what they are. If what has been built withstands the test of fire, it will be rewarded.

The apostle Paul reassured the believers of their just reward when he said: “Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free” (Ephesians 6:8). He also made this point as he was encouraging the Roman believers not to judge one another: “But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. . . . So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:10, 12).

## A New Heaven and a New Earth

“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind” (Isaiah 65:17).

Following the great white throne judgment, God will create a new heaven and a new earth. There will be no more death, and Jesus will give up the throne to God the Father. The new Jerusalem will come down from heaven, and everything

will be changed. There will no longer be day and night in the new Jerusalem, because the Lamb is the light. “And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof” (Revelation 21:23). “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:4). And those who enter are they who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

## Conclusion

While the end times scenario feels overwhelmingly bleak for the world, that is not the case for true believers, because those who follow the beast “make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful” (Revelation 17:14).

As believers, we should be ready to meet our Savior. This isn’t an event we should fear. As His children, the thought should elate us and fill us with hope and confidence. After all, we know the end of the story. As we wait for Him, we should have within us a deep longing to be found faithful when He returns. We should also be filled with compassion for unbelievers, because we understand the consequences.

This chapter only begins to scratch the surface regarding the information the Lord has provided us about end times. As you study further, remember that as history unfolds, we are working toward the completion of God’s eternal purposes and His triumphant return as the risen Lord.

## Prayer

Our Father in heaven, Your Son has declared that He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and

the last. His revelation to the apostle John gives us a clear understanding of the future. Lord, let us accept and love these commandments, for You have said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” Lord, we love You with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. We thank You for sharing these visions of the future so we understand the seasons ahead, understand heaven and hell, and understand the gracious love and justice You will bestow upon believers and unbelievers alike. Let us not be divided, but unified, on our understanding of the end times, so we are better prepared to respond to the times in which we live. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

## Afterword

### One Man’s Story

In my story of being lost and found, I had to ask the questions: Where was I in my spiritual journey? Had I trusted in Christ by faith for the forgiveness of my sins? I had to make a choice, for there are only two. I was already on my own selfish path, but it didn’t bring me any satisfaction. The only other choice was God’s path – according to His Word, and not according to Amish tradition.

Jesus said, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 4:17). What did that mean? I already felt sorry for my sins, and it just made me feel more ashamed and unhappy. I learned that repentance means to change your mind about something or to change directions. I had to turn *from* the teachings I grew up with that were contrary to Scripture and turn *to* Christ’s teachings in the Bible. I

couldn’t do this until I understood God’s view of sin. I thought that much of what I was doing was okay, until I compared myself with God’s law—“*to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin*” (James 4:17). God commands “*all men every where to repent*” (Acts 17:30). I was a selfish, proud, lying, lustful man in God’s eyes, and I willfully chose to agree with Him and go His direction.

My next step in life was to place my faith in Jesus Christ—not just to say, “Jesus Christ is the Son of God,” but to believe it. Do you know what that requires? First let me say that faith only comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). How can we come to faith if we have to read the Bible in a language we hardly understand? It is defeating the purpose. Philippians 2:10 says to bow the knee to the name of Jesus. That means a surrender of our will to do His. I not only agreed with God about my sinfulness, but I also believed that He took the guilt and shame of my sin onto Himself and died in my place on the cross. That means that I am free from the punishment of my sin – free from the wrath of God to come (Romans 5:9). Because of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection I am justified – cleared of my guilt. My so-called good works had nothing to do with it (Romans 5:1).

As a result of the shed blood of Christ, I, through repentance and faith, was born again (John 3:3, 5). My inner man was regenerated, made new! I now have a new way of seeing things – new thoughts,

new words, and new actions (2 Corinthians 5:17). I am now a partaker of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). God has written His law of love on my heart (Hebrews 8:10). I no longer have to obey God’s law because I’m required to do so. I obey Him because I want to! I love Him, because He first loved me.

*“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. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation”* (Romans 10:9-10).

## Prayer

Thank You, Father, for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross so our sins could be forgiven. Thank You for providing the gift of eternal life and making it available to all who place their trust in Jesus Christ.

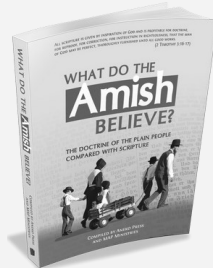
Many people on earth are living a lie. They trust in their own works for salvation, and they hardly read their Bible or talk about You to anyone. They don’t fully grasp the fact that You want a real relationship with them, and that they must be born again.

Father, I don’t want them to miss out on the amazingness of heaven. Please show them that You are real. Draw them to Yourself and open their blind eyes and deaf ears. Help them understand the truth about Jesus Christ and the finished work on the cross. May today be the day of salvation for many people. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.

**End**

## Amish Beliefs

Do your beliefs line up with those of our Anabaptist forefathers? In this 160-page book, *What Do the Amish Believe?*, nine authors took the time to go back and study the original beliefs of our forefathers and compare what they believed to what many of us believe today. A \$5 donation covers the cost of printing and postage.



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**The Amish Voice**  
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**Greenwich, OH 44837**  
**or call us at (419) 962-1515**

# Feedback and Response

Dear *Amish Voice*,

Greetings in the name of Jesus.

I enjoyed your article, a while ago called “What Do Jehovah’s Witnesses Actually Believe?” We have delighted to invite Jehovah’s Witnesses in for Bible study and discussions.

Knowing that they err in their beliefs, we have tried hard to discern so we can admonish and rebuke. We have found them to be very cautious and vague about what they actually believe when sitting down in study with a Bible. Maybe one of the greatest deceptions about them is their outwardness—modest dress and clean and kind speech and conduct. This is all in vain if it is not in and through Christ Jesus!

We all may have heard it said in our Plain circles that it is dangerous to reach out or study with people outside our

Amish religion. While this may be true for some people, have we asked ourselves why it is dangerous? There is only one reason it could be dangerous to reach out to Jehovah’s Witnesses, and that is when we are not clearly taught, firmly grounded, and fully believe the truths of God’s Word. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all his ways (James 1:8).

It is time we step out in faith and go beyond the Mennonite, Amish, Hutterite, and Brethren beliefs, beyond the traditions and commandments of men in search of truth as found only in God’s Holy Word. The woman at the well was very sincere about following the beliefs and customs of Abraham, Jacob, and her forefathers, but Jesus told her, “*Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews*” (John 4:22).

May we know what we believe in Jesus and be so zealous and compassionate about following Him that we would assure our hearts of His precious promise where He tells us, “*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand*” (John 10:27–29).

Please send me a copy of your booklet “Jehovah’s Witnesses and Their Beliefs.”

Thank you. Thank you also for the *Amish Voice*.

In Christian love,

J. D. M., Ohio

Dear J. D. M.,

Thank you for your letter and your love for God and others. You are right. Jesus taught His followers to go in to all the world and proclaim His gospel. We are not really following Him if we do not know Him, if we do not live for Him, or if we do not share His truth and love with others.

If we really love God and love others, we will want to tell those around us about

the Savior who died to take away our sin.

You are right, too, that there are many groups such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, and others who preach a false gospel. As you said, we need to know and love the Word of God so that we are not deceived and so we are able to convince others of God’s truth according to His Word.

God does not tell us to glory in or boast in our religion or denomination, but in

Him (Jeremiah 9:24).

Let us learn, love, and live the Word of God. As David wrote, “*Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts*” (Psalm 119:98–100).

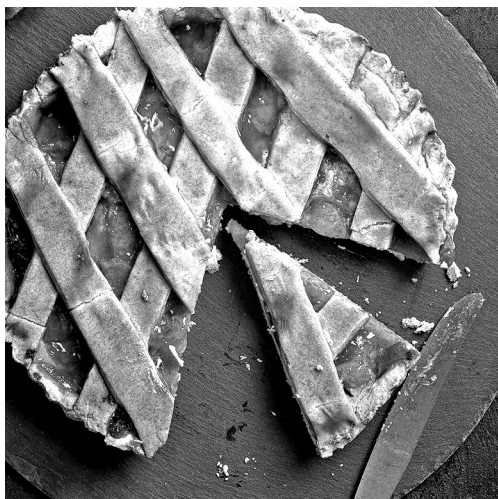
—Paul Miller

**We love hearing from you, our readers. We want to hear from all of you—with your suggestions, responses, articles, disagreements, poems, letters, testimonies, ideas, lessons you have learned, or whatever you want to say. Please write to us—and we will try to publish much of what you send. We would love to hear your testimonies of how you have been changed by Jesus and how the *Amish Voice* is helping you grow closer to God.**

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you! Write to us!**





I was recently thinking over an event that happened to me. As I was hurting, praying, and trying to process it all, I went to my prayer closet and began reading the book *Uninvited*. I also began to pray and journal about my thoughts and feelings. Before I share specifics of how God spoke to me through my circumstances and this book, I would like to share a little bit of my life.

My mother had mental issues, so when I was young, my dad thought it would be best for me to go to live with another family. In all actuality, I ended up living in several different homes, and although the couples I stayed with were good to me, deep down I always knew they were not my mom and dad.

I cried a lot because I didn't fully know what was going on, and, of course, I missed my parents and knew something wasn't right. Because of my emotions and confusion about my place in life, I didn't have very many friends, and I didn't feel like people liked me. Soon, I realized that the problem was me and that maybe I was too much for my mom and dad to handle. I worried that maybe I was too much for others to handle as well. My emotions were messy, and I wasn't good enough; I felt unvalued and insignificant.

It seemed like no one wanted to hear

what I had to say, so I wandered around as a little girl with a bleeding heart. No one seemed to notice the pain I was going through. When I talked, it seemed like someone was always shushing me. I felt like my voice was stolen from me, and I had nowhere to belong. As I continued to grow older, I was always looking for a place of significance, but I never seemed to find it; instead, it always felt like there was no room for me.

As for my thoughts about God, I shared the view that is described in the *Uninvited* book. I saw the kingdom of God as a big pie with only so many slices, and if my friends got a slice, that meant there were fewer slices available for me. For this reason, I felt jealous at others' successes and ministries. I now realize the beautiful truth; that in God's house, there are endless slices of pie available for all to partake of!

Time passed, and I grew up and got married. My husband and I moved twelve times in the span of twenty years, so I still I felt like I didn't know where or what home was. It felt like I was always leaving friends and then needing to find new ones. Sooner or later, my friends would reach out less, and talk less and less, until eventually our communication would fizzle out completely. I continued to struggle with feeling appreciated and valued.

In addition, each time we moved we would find a new church, and it almost felt like going to a new school. The women at each church seemed to already know each other and clearly didn't need me. This became harder for me as I felt a stronger calling to partake in a counseling and women's ministry. I questioned, "How in the world am I going to find my way if no one needs me, wants me, or notices me?"

Every few years, I would have an experience where I did or said something out of a sincere desire to help, but it

seemed that I would always end up causing hurt and withdrawal. This failure to help would hurt me so desperately because I had a compassionate heart. If I realized that I hurt someone, it devastated me. In addition, I knew in my heart that I was never trying to come across in a mean way, but sometimes I couldn't help myself.

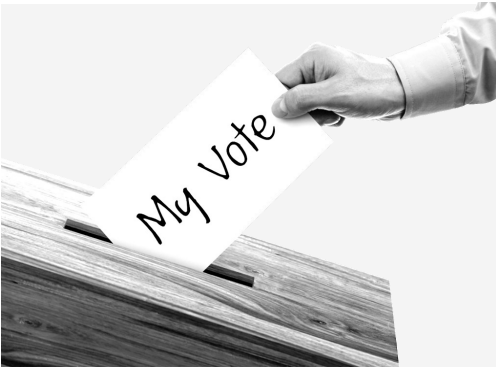
If you fast forward several years to now, you would probably notice that a lot has changed in my life. I recently woke up and saw the word Häagen-Dazs. I wondered what this word meant. I seemed to remember it being a brand of ice cream, so I looked it up and saw that it was indeed related to ice cream. Häagen-Dazs ice cream was invented by a peasant couple in New York. This couple began making and selling high quality ice cream from a homemade recipe that quickly became famous.

As I sat there reading about the ice cream company, I realized that I used to think God was giving me some special recipe or idea for financial success, but I never knew what it would be. Then, as I began to read through the book *Uninvited*, as I mentioned earlier, I came across the most beautiful words ever written:

"There is an abundant need in this world for your exact brand of beautiful."

I realized with joy that this is my Häagen-Dazs: I am my own, unique, crazy brand of beautiful! I quickly understood that the reason I kept unintentionally hurting others is that I hadn't truly realized this amazing truth, at least not fully all the way down to my toes! I realized it in my head, but my heart wasn't completely accepting it, so if I felt unheard or unneeded, my words would come out more forcefully than I intended. What could have been gently hinted at would instead be sweepingly stated in a way that felt harsh to the other person and created a rift between us.

**Continued on Page 13**



As you know from previous issues of the Amish Voice, we believe it is our duty to get involved in the voting process of our government officials.

Like many of you, we were taught as children to stay away from government handouts and to separate from politics as much as possible. With that, we kept ourselves separated to a large extent. We made our own list of laws and rules to follow, and when our laws clashed with the English laws, we seldom lost.

In May of 1972, the Amish in Wisconsin went all the way to the Supreme Court to fight for educational rights. This Amish group refused to let the laws of the land control them or their children's level of education. How one feels about the winning outcome is not my point, but what I would like to point out is that the Amish stood up, and they won. They were able to accomplish this because thousands of Amish and non-Amish fought and benefitted. Not only did the victory allow Amish to continue teaching their own children, it gave others more liberty to home school as well.

There have been many other times throughout history that Amish stood up and fought for their rights. For instance, when I was growing up, the law tried to force my community to put orange triangles on our buggies; we fought the law and won. Others have fought over building permits or vaccinations and have also won.

The truth is our Anabaptist forefathers have always been fighters. Many were hated, separated from their families, lived

in fear, and even killed for taking stands. The government-run church was determined to win and refused to back off, which went on for more than just one generation. But guess who won? The Anabaptists! The fighters for religious freedom. And, once again, more than just the Amish have benefited from these victories.

Now, let's fast forward to the year 2020. Here we all are living in a world that is becoming so evil that it reminds us of the days of Noah and the flood. Wickedness abounds. Homosexuality, murdering millions of innocent and living babies in the womb, and mass shootings are becoming common occurrences. The list of pure evil in our country only gets longer and more intense with the passing of years. Many of us are concerned about the future of our precious children and grandchildren.

Can you and I stop the chaos and power-hungry government from taking over? Is there anything we can do to protect our religious freedom and children?

Most say yes, but then come the multitudes of opinions on how to do it. Some say to put everything in God's hands. Others say that we must speak up and fight for our freedom! And then there's the group that says it's all going to come to an end anyway, so why not just let it run its course and be done! I'll tell you, I'm sure glad our forefathers didn't follow that line of thinking.

I sincerely believe that from the very beginning, God commanded us to get involved in the world we live in. Let's take a look.

In Genesis 1:28, God commanded the very first couple to "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

We know what fruitful, multiply, and replenish mean, but what do the phrases

"subdue it" and "have dominion" mean?

- ♦ "Subdue" means tread down, conquer, and bring into subjection. — Further study defines the root of subdue as meaning *footstool*.
- ♦ "Have dominion" means prevail against, reign, and rule.

This verse was not a suggestion, but rather a command, straight from the mouth of our Creator. If it (whatever *it* may be) lives and moves on the earth, it is our duty to subdue it and have dominion over it. From this, and many other scriptures, we have learned the value and need for various levels of authority in the family, church, and our government.

God was also very clear in Deuteronomy 12:2-3, when He said to His people, the Jews: "Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place."

Let's move on to the prophet Jeremiah and God's clear command to the young boy, who is still in his teenage years:

In Jeremiah 1:10, God tells the prophet, "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant."

At first, I felt like the negative things this verse commands were not for me. I would much rather just build and plant. But I've come to realize that before I can build and plant, I need to root out, pull down, and destroy.

If the Lord is the same "yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8), and if He changes not (Malachi 3:6), then why would we not at least consider these commands among many others in Scripture with the exact same message?

Now that we have a better understanding of God and His clear commands, let's ask the question again: Should I get involved in voting? Does God care?

I say yes, we must get involved. It is our duty and obedience to God's command! In fact, if our parents and grandparents would have taken a more serious stand and gotten involved, our government may be in a different shape than it is in today. You and I should not expect an ungodly government leader to make Godly decisions and lead us in a Godly direction. Godly decisions and directions take place when we have Godly leaders in office.

Let me tell you a true story that happened in my life:

About ten years ago, many believers in my county got together and decided to claim the lands of Ashland for God. Men, women and families began to meet on a regular basis to pray. Preachers and lay people traveled around to every single highway and byway that lead into Ashland County and prayed. They prayed that God would not allow evil to enter our county.

Not only did God's people pray fervently, but each one began to encourage the Godly believers in our county to run for leadership positions. One by one, God's people voted for Godly leaders, and one by one, God gave us the desires of our heart.

Today, it is not uncommon for our city mayor and others to stand up in public and declare their love for and devotion to the Scriptures. Many in office have clear testimonies of surrendering their lives to Jesus Christ; they are not ashamed to share the truth of God in public.

This did not happen overnight. It took prayer, and it required meetings, planning, stepping up to the plate, and yes, voting.

It does not end there. You see, before we had Godly leaders in position, some of the businesses in our county were closing their doors. Thousands of people were losing jobs; families were hurting and losing homes; and downtown stores looked more ghostly than alive. But then something wonderful happened. God's people started taking dominion over the county and city

of Ashland; they began to pull down, destroy, and throw down.

After that, the building and planting began. Big CEO's came riding into the city of Ashland, looking to build a laundry factory. Our Mayor, Matt Miller, made it clear: before we make any decisions in this city, we seek direction from the Living God of the universe. They bowed their heads and prayed with those big-money wigs. Before long, the new laundry business was going up, and folks in the community were buying old ghostly-looking store fronts downtown and turning them into beautiful and prosperous businesses.

Who do you want ruling over you? Your children? Your grandchildren?

I already know your answer because I believe it's the same as mine. We want Godly leaders in our counties, cities, state, and country.

Will you join me by registering to vote in 2020? Will you cast a vote for whom you believe will lead our Country in the right direction? I hope so. I really do hope so. If for no other reason, let's do it for the sake of our children and grandchildren. Let's do it for the sake of the innocent babies, who are being murdered daily. Let's do it as unto obedience to our Living and Righteous God. We are His feet, His hands and His voice in the world today!

Matthew 5:13-15: *"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. <sup>14</sup> Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. <sup>15</sup> Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house."*

**END**



**ISSUES ON THE BALLOT IN 2020:**

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- JUDGES**

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## March

### Not Everything Matters

Monica Swanson, author of *Boy Mom*, talks about the challenges and joys of raising boys. She reminds moms that they can simplify the pressures they feel by simplifying their parenting. Much of parenting is trial and error. Each person has to figure out what works best for their family.

### The Amazing in Amazing Grace

Duane Sheriff explains that we should never cease to be amazed by the grace of God in our lives. No matter how long we've been in relationship with God, how many miracles we've seen, or answered prayers we've received, we will never reach the end of what God can do—which is exceedingly above what we can ask, think, or imagine.

### Corrie ten Boom

Corrie ten Boom, Holocaust survivor and follower of Jesus, tells of her experience through all her difficulties and how she learned to rest in the love of God.

### Peter Orasuk

Peter Orasuk was a heroin addict and drug kingpin in Canada until Christ reached down and saved him. This is his testimony that was preached in the Ballymena Gospel Hall in N. Ireland. This is a 'must hear', not only for people who are doing drugs, but for anyone who wants to hear of the power of Christ to save the most hopeless of sinners.

## April

### Your Boy's Spiritual Formation

Mom and author Monica Swanson talks about the importance of spiritually disciplining sons. Swanson encourages parents to be purposeful about incorporating God's Word into their children's daily lives. She and her husband have done this by teaching their boys to search for answers in the Bible and modeling an active faith for them at church and at home.

### Better Together, Part 1—Security and Trust

Every marriage must be built on shared commitment and

understanding - the assurance that someone will love and value you for a lifetime: a knowing and constant awareness that whatever the problem, with God's help, we will overcome. (Message by Duane Sheriff.)

### Better Together, Part 2—Communication A

What is true communication? Did you know that you cannot hear if you are angry, hurt or defensive? Learn how to successfully communicate within your marriage, home, and life. (Message by Duane Sheriff.)

### In the Hands of a Rapist

Kidnapped from a Kmart parking lot, Margy Mayfield spent the next ten hours with a violent and dangerous criminal. Stephan Morin had never known anything but driving hatred, until he experienced the love of Christ. What happened on their journey is nothing short of miraculous!

## May

### Better Together, Part 3—Communication B

Good communication is about unity and mutual understanding, not about who is right or wrong. (Message by Duane Sheriff.)

### Better Together, Part 4—Forgiveness

What is true communication? Did you know that you cannot hear if you are angry, hurt or defensive? Learn how to successfully communicate within your marriage, home, and life. (Message by Duane Sheriff.)

### The Midnight Cry and the Rapture of the Church

Are you ready to hear, "Behold the Bridegroom cometh?" Adrian Rogers describes the who, what, when and why of Jesus' exciting return for His own!

### Living Free from Shame and Guilt (Part 1 of 2)

Jamie Ivey discusses the struggles she once experienced over guilt about her troubled past, and describes how she found freedom from shame in a discussion based on her book, *If You Only Knew: My Unlikely, Unavoidable Story of Becoming Free*. (Message from Focus on the Family.)



I remember it like yesterday. It was the day that I “spilled the beans.” There I sat in the gazebo. It was late afternoon. The warm sunshine brightened the landscape around me. The birds were singing cheerfully. But I didn’t notice.

I was dead on the inside. I had died years before.

How I got to the place in my life where I wanted freedom is still a mystery to me. But, in God’s time, I saw a ray of hope. I clung to it. I wanted to be free so badly. I realized that I needed to tell someone. Someone who could help me. Mysteriously, a loving Father steered this broken little girl to people who pointed her to Him.

I proceeded to rid myself of everything I could think of that made me feel dirty, unlovable and used. Though there was much about the abuse that I didn’t remember at that point, there was still plenty of junk that needed to be released. Things that had been done to me. Things that I had done.

There was no emotion as I hauntingly told of the fantasies and masturbation. The

magazines. The cursing. The pictures I took. The attention men had given me that I both hated and craved. I couldn’t make eye contact with my dorm mom. I tried, but it was impossible. I was too ashamed.

It wasn’t pretty. Rather, the things I disclosed that day were ugly, evil, and vile. I felt like I wasn’t worth fighting for. In a way, this was my last hope.

The dorm mom listened with rapt attention. Finally, all the ugly was out. Out of the dark and into the Light.

There was a moment of silence.

And then came the question that changed my life: “Ann, do you believe that God loves you?”

My mind instantly kicked in. “Of course! I was taught that before I went to Sunday School!,” I was about to say. But I stopped.

Did I? Did I really believe that Jesus loves me? Suddenly, the realization swept over me.

“No,” I managed to stammer shamefully.

How could He? I was ugly. Dirty. Worthless. Besides, I had done terrible things!

A wave of emotion caught me off guard. I began to weep in earnest.

In that moment, I met Jesus.

I felt His arms go around me. I saw His tears mingle with mine. I heard the compassion and love in His voice as He gently whispered, “Ann, it doesn’t matter. I love you. I always have, and I always will.”

I’ve never been the same since.

Instead of pushing God’s love away, I began to choose to receive it. What a difference it made! It changed everything for me.

Oh, I’ve had plenty of ups and downs. I

still do. (Just ask my husband!) It hasn’t been an easy road. But the answer to that important question marks the beginning of my journey to freedom and healing from sexual abuse.

I don’t know where you’re at in your life. Maybe you too, feel emotionally dead. Maybe you are the little girl or the little boy who feels worthless and dirty. Or maybe you feel like you’ve done too much evil and that there’s no hope for you.

Let me tell you: There is hope in Jesus Christ. Not only hope, but also healing. He loves you more than you know. He loves you no matter what you’ve done or what others have done to you. I beg you to believe that with all your heart.

It’s safe to come to Him. He won’t turn you away. He does not despise a broken, contrite heart. Tell Him everything. Spill it all. Get rid of all the filth.

Maybe you want to meet Jesus, but you feel incapable of coming to Jesus. If so, find someone whom you trust who knows Jesus and has experienced His love in a personal way. Then, spill the dirt and grime. Don’t hold anything back from the Light. Choose to begin your journey of healing today.

And so, I ask you: “Do you really believe that Jesus loves you?”

Your answer to this question could change everything for you—just as it did for me.

**END**

## Pie - Continued from Page 9

And this, my friends, is how God turns something ugly into something beautiful. I love the picture God gave me of my own special version of rich, creamy ice cream to share with the world! You have one too! We all need each other, and each one of us is an incredible asset to the family of God. We are all needed and valuable pieces to this puzzle called Life!

**END**

*“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love him”* (James 1:12). These powerful verses may shake our thinking a bit!

Don't we all admire the person who goes through life seeming like they have no trials or temptations? There may be such people, but very few. We all have our trials; our “thorns in the flesh.” Who wants trials? Or who wants to go through temptations? None of us do, really.

*“For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth and scourgeth”* (to afflict greatly) *“every son whom he receiveth”* (Hebrews

12:6). A growing Christian will realize that God uses trials and temptations to bring us to the end of our strength and abilities. He wants us to rely on Him alone. Even Christ learned obedience. How? By the things that He suffered.

A good attitude to have when we are facing a trial, hardship, or temptation, is to ask God, “Lord what do you want to teach me with this thing?” Then, let God show you.

*“Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby”* (Hebrews

12:11).

*“To them that are exercised thereby”* — that is the key. God may break us in order to use us. Let the chastisement do a good work in us.

*“But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons”* (Hebrews 12:8). Strong words from God.

So whatever the trial, the temptation, or the hardship that you are facing, tell God. This is for your good, and anything from God will simply help you in the long run.

*“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him”* (Job 13:15a).

**END**

## Born Again Cont. from Back Page

realize He was referring to a spiritual rebirth: *“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”* (John 3:5).

First, notice Jesus again began His second declaration with the words, *“Verily, verily.”* Of course, Jesus never lied. So we should believe everything He said. How much more when He prefaces His words with *“Verily, verily”!*

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

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

Third, it is from this declaration by Jesus

we realize that, to be born again, one does not need to re-enter his mother's womb. Rather, he needs to *“be born of water and the Spirit.”* What does that mean?

Some think the phrase being *“born of water”* refers to a physical birth, which is often preceded by a rush of water-like fluid from the breaking of a mother's amniotic sac. If this is the correct interpretation, Jesus was simply telling Nicodemus that one must experience both a physical and a spiritual birth in order to see and enter God's kingdom. Jesus seems to also draw this contrast in His very next sentence: *“That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit”* (John 3:6).

Other interpreters, however, wonder why Jesus would affirm to Nicodemus something that is so obvious, namely, that one must be physically born to ultimately enter God's kingdom. For that reason, some think Jesus was referring to water baptism, or to something else that the word water might symbolically represent, such as the word of God, spiritual purification, or the Holy Spirit (see Ezek. 36:25; John 7:38-39; Titus 3:5; Eph. 5:26; 1 Cor. 6:11). I don't see a great need to be dogmatic about any single interpretation, as all of them

contain some biblical truth. Every new believer should be baptized in water. And one must respond in faith to God's word as revealed in the gospel, be spiritually cleansed, and be indwelt and transformed by the Holy Spirit to enter God's kingdom. According to the New Testament, all those things occur when one is born again. So let us focus on what it means to be *“born of the Spirit.”*

## Being Born of the Spirit

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

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

*“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Thes. 5:23).

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

My soul is my mind, emotions, and intellect.

My spirit is revealed in the Bible as

being the “true person,” who lives on even after my body dies:

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

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

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

“*And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath*

*quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)*” (Eph. 2:1-5).

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

This state of spiritual death is the same state in which Adam and Eve found themselves when they sinned. God had told them they would die on the day they ate the forbidden fruit, but Scripture tells us that Adam lived hundreds of years after he sinned. So he must have died spiritually that day. He found himself cast out of Eden, alienated from God. That is the state of every spiritually dead person. It is not only their sin that separates them from God, but their sinful nature.

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

Thankfully, the Christians in Ephesus had all experienced that wonderful

spiritual regeneration. As we just read in Paul’s letter to them, God, in His great mercy and love, changed them from being dead to being alive, spiritually. That is just another way to describe being born again. Both Jesus and the apostle John referred to the spiritual rebirth as “passing from death to life”:

“*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life*” (John 5:24; see also 1 John 3:14).

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

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

Paul wrote, “*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*” (2 Cor. 5:17).

To be Continued in the Next Issue

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## What Does It Really Mean to be Born Again? Part 1

—By David Miller

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

What made her warning so tragic is that she had attended a Methodist church every Sunday. Not only was the founder of her denomination—John Wesley—fully persuaded almost 300 years ago of the necessity of being born again, but even more persuaded was the founder of all of Christianity—Jesus Christ—about 2,000 years ago! Jesus once said to a very religious man, a highly-respected teacher and Pharisee named Nicodemus:

*"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"* (John 3:3).

Take note that that solemn declaration, spoken by the King of God's kingdom, begins with the words, "*Verily, verily.*" Jesus didn't want Nicodemus—or anyone else—to take His words lightly. It was a declaration of unassailable truth

uttered by the very Son of God: Unless one is born again, he absolutely cannot see the kingdom of God. There are no exceptions. For that reason, everyone, and especially those who profess to be Christians, should ask themselves this very important question: Have I been born again? (And if you answered "yes," a second important question is: "Have I REALLY been born again?")

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

Conversely, one who has been born again is comparable to a baby who has escaped the womb and now entered into

a brand-new world he previously could not see. The born-again believer has his eyes opened to see God's kingdom. He realizes there is (of course) a great king—Jesus Himself—who rules over that kingdom. He understands that Jesus' kingdom includes not only himself, but everyone who has submitted to His loving rule. For his "fellow kingdom citizens," he feels a special affinity, a supernatural love. He soon realizes that Jesus' kingdom extends all over the world, and that it will one day be the only kingdom on earth—when Jesus finally banishes all those who did not heed His solemn words: "*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*"

## The Conversation Begins

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

Nicodemus apparently thought Jesus was referring to a physical rebirth. So Jesus repeated what He had already said, but altered it slightly to help Nicodemus

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