



MAP ♦ 575 US Highway 250 ♦ Greenwich, OH 44837 ♦ (419) 962-1515 ♦ November 2025

The Secret of the Strength

— by Peter Hoover

CHAPTER 19

On to an Ethical Way of Life

As a child, Ursula Hellrigl had to leave her home in the deep valley of the River Inn. Travelling fast, at night, through the forests, and along mountain trails from Austria, she arrived with her parents at Auspitz in Moravia. There, upon reaching her early teens, she decided to follow Christ and joined the community through baptism. When the families from Auspitz needed to flee in 1535, Ursula and a company of refugees fell into the hands of the police at Passau in Bavaria. She was fifteen years old.

Ursula steadfastly resisted the tortures through which the authorities tried to get her to recant. Even though she rarely caught a glimpse of him, she knew that the young man she admired, the “lively and quick-witted” Hans Fuchs, who had travelled with the group from Moravia, was also in prison. He was sixteen years old. But they sent him to Venice as a galley slave, and transferred her to the dark, evil, castle of the Vellenberg, above the city of Innsbruck in Austria.

Ursula was grief-stricken, homesick, and lonely. Her mother had died in prison, and two older brothers were also imprisoned, but she no longer knew where. Then, after five years of miserable confinement, she learned of another Anabaptist in the castle.



Cattle brought down from the Alm, through the village of Götzens in Tyrol with its notorious Vellenberg prison, now a private residence. Even though life continued as usual for those that did not join the Anabaptist movement, large numbers of farmers and tradesmen—even persons in authority and of noble families—secretly supported them and deplored harsh government action against them. Some supplied hidden believers with food and warned others of impending danger.

Austrian authorities had thrown Jörg Liebich, an Anabaptist messenger, into the dungeon of the Vellenberg after they caught him preaching in the upper Inn Valley. People said the place was haunted, and on several occasions, evil

apparitions rose up in his cell. The devil tempted him in visible form. But after Jörg had suffered months of mental and physical agony, the lord of the castle suddenly put Jörg into a comfortable room and gave him good food to eat. They brought Ursula into the same room and chained one of her feet to one of his. Then they left them alone day after day. Kaspar Braitmichel wrote:

What the devil and his children wanted to see is easily apparent. But they kept themselves pure and feared God. They did not allow themselves to be led astray by any temptation.¹

Both Jörg and Ursula spent their time with Christ. While the days grew long, Ursula wrote a song:

Eternal Father in heaven, I call to You from my innermost being. Do not let me turn away from You, but keep me in Your truth until the end. Oh God, keep my heart and my mouth. Watch over me every hour. Do not let me turn away from You because of anxiety, fear, or distress. Keep me steadfast in Your joy.... I lie here in chains, waiting on You, God, with a very great longing (*mit*

¹ *Geschichtsbuech*, ca. 1570

sehr großem Verlangen) for the time when You will set me free.²

Hope and Ethics

The Roman Catholic authorities of the Vellenberg, knowing human nature, expected to see Jörg Liebich and Ursula Hellrigl fall into sin, but they did not understand the prisoners' great longing to see Christ, and how that longing purified them as Christ is pure.

Menno Simons wrote in 1541:

The Word of God is stirring up our German countries with its teachings. The finger of God can be felt in this, while the Word becomes daily more powerful and clear. The haughty are humbled. The greedy learn to share. Drunkards become sober. The immoral become pure. Men fear to think a thought or do a deed contrary to God's Word and will.³

Shining Lights

"Walk worthy of the Lord and the Gospel," wrote Menno Simons. "Do whatever God asks of you without complaining. Act so that none may truthfully accuse you. Be sincere. Be blameless in this crooked and perverse generation. Shine like beautiful lights, like torches in the dark night of this evil world."⁴

Hans Denck wrote in 1525:

All unbelief is sin.... Only when the law has done its work in us and when we stop seeking our own good can the Gospel find room in our hearts. We get faith by listening to the Gospel. Where there is faith, there is no sin. Where there is no sin, there the righteousness of God dwells. The righteousness of God is God himself. Sin is that which is contrary to God. All believers were at one time unbe-

lievers. To become believers, their old man had to die. They had to stop living for themselves (like they did in unbelief), and they had to let God begin to live in them through Christ. They had to stop living in an earthly way and start living in a heavenly way.⁵

Anabaptist leaders meeting at Schlatten in Switzerland clearly separated the works of darkness from the works of light:

Things that are not united to God cannot be other than abominations from which we must flee. By this we mean all Roman Catholic and Protestant activities, such as church services, public meetings, politics, the swearing of oaths, and drinking houses.... From all these things we shall be separated....Neither will we use unchristian, devilish weapons such as swords and armour, for Christ said "resist not evil."⁶

The Ethic of Decency

Menno Simons wrote:

We know that he who fears the Lord is honest, chaste, and sober. He will never drink, talk, sing, and dance with frivolous women.⁷

Keep strict watch over yourselves, both outwardly and inwardly. Trim, teach, purify, warn, and chasten your hearts with the Word of God. Curb your thoughts. Subdue and distinguish your evil desires in the fear of the Lord, for blessed are the pure in heart.

Just as there are many wicked men who violate poor, simple women, so, on the other hand, we find

shameless women and girls. Many times they are the reason that such disgrace is sought and practiced upon them. Although many are not guilty of the deed, they are guilty of having too much to do with male companions. By their bold singing, dancing, drinking, kissing, flirting, primping and fixing up, they kindle the fire of base passions, which continue until they are consumed.⁸

Ethics and Education

The educated scoffed at the first Anabaptists for following unlearned men, but they were mistaken. Numerous early Anabaptist leaders had studied at the best universities in northern Europe, and even those of humble origin soon became "learned" in the Scriptures. Felix Manz read and interpreted the Hebrew Old Testament to a study group in his home. Conrad Grebel, writing to his brother-in-law and former teacher in the university of Vienna, Dr. Joachim von Watt, told of his Bible class where they were studying the Gospel of Matthew in Greek. A Latin poem by Conrad Grebel appeared in a book published by Huldrych Zwingli.

The first Anabaptists, although they disapproved of much that went on at the universities, did not, in any way, disapprove of learning. Their children learned to read well and much. Menno Simons, who wrote a great amount in Dutch and Latin wrote:

I have never disdained education, nor proficiency in languages. In fact I have honoured and coveted both from my youth. But unfortunately I have never attained to them. I am not so bereft of common sense that I should disdain the knowledge of languages (Hebrew

² *Ausbund*, 36. In the *Ausbund*, the song is mistakenly attributed to Anna of Freiburg.

³ *Van dat rechte Christen ghelooue...* ca. 1542

⁴ *Een liefelijke Vermaninghe aen den verstroyden, en onbekenden kinderen Gods, Anno LVI.*

⁵ From the confession Hans presented to the court at Nürnberg in Bavaria in January, 1535.

⁶ *Brüderlich Vereinigung etzlicher Kinder Gottes sieben Artikel betreffend*, February 24, 1527

⁷ *Dat Fundament des Christelycken leers...* 1539

⁸ *Van dat rechte Christen ghelooue ...* ca. 1542

and Greek) through which the precious Word of Grace has come to us. Rather, I wish that I and all the godly ones would be at home in these languages, if we would employ them in genuine humility to the glory of God and the service of our fellowmen.⁹

Education for the Anabaptists involved the learning of both spiritual and elementary facts. They learned not to exalt themselves but to use their learning for the good of others. Especially in Moravia, the education of children became an important work of the Lord's community.

The Ethic of Selflessness

The first Anabaptists, following Christ, lived for others. Hans Leupold, beheaded at Augsburg in 1527, said:

If we know of anyone who is in need, whether or not he is a member of our church community, we believe it our duty, out of love to God, to help him.¹⁰

Speaking about the state churches, Menno Simons wrote:

These people boast of being true Christians in spite of the fact that they have lost the sign of true Christianity altogether. Many have plenty of everything. They wear

expensive, stylish clothes. They ornament their houses with costly furniture. They have money and live in luxury. But they allow their own members, those who have been baptized and who have partaken of the same bread with them, to beg. They allow the poor, the hungry, the suffering, the old, the lame, the blind, and the sick to beg for bread.¹¹

A Protestant attending an Anabaptist meeting near Strasbourg in 1557 reported the questions put to the converts who were baptized:

Are you ready if necessary to give all your possessions to the service of the brothers? Do you promise not to fail any brother that is in need if you are able to help him?¹²

For many Anabaptists the evidence of selflessness was freedom from private property in total community of goods.

Business Ethics

Conrad Grebel had a special problem with Christians charging interest on loans. He and most other Anabaptists taught that charging interest was of the devil, and they did not believe that Christians could be bankers, financiers, or owners of large businesses. Peter Rideman wrote:

We allow none of our number to work as a dealer or a merchant since this is sinful. The wise man says, "It is almost impossible for a dealer or a merchant to keep himself from sin. Like a nail sticks between the door and the hinge, so does sin stick between buying and selling." Therefore, we allow no one to buy to sell again as the dealers do. But to buy what is neces-

sary for the needs of one's house or craft, to use it and then sell what one produces, we consider right and good.¹³

Daily Ethics

For a thousand years the church of the Dark Ages had taught people that only a few (the "religious"), could live an ethical life, and that the great majority of Christians (the "secular") needed to live in sin. A truly ethical lifestyle, they taught, was characteristic of religious orders, but apart from them it could not be expected.

The Reformers saw it differently. They did away with monasteries and religious orders and believed that all men should live right, at least on the Lord's day.

But the first Anabaptists did not involve ethics with place nor time. In touch with the Lord Jesus, they lived to please Him every day of the week. For this reason, the keeping of a "Sunday-Sabbath" held no significance for them.

Mang Karger, converted in South Tyrol in Austria (now northern Italy) testified before the Roman Catholic court in 1529:

In the beginning God made the earth in six days, then He rested on the seventh. This is where the keeping of the Lord's day came from, and this is where I will leave it. The Scriptures do not forbid working on Sunday, and it is not a sin, but one should celebrate it and keep it holy, unlike the priests who spend their Sunday forenoons in idolatry and their Sunday afternoons in adultery.¹⁴

Benedikt Kamperer's wife, Agathe, also interrogated in 1529, said:

⁹ *Eyne klare vñwedsprekelike bekentenisse vnde anwijsinge*...ca. 1554

¹⁰ Hans Leupold, who wrote the triumphant song *Mein Gott dich will ich Joben*...(Ausbund, 39) shortly before his death, was arrested with 88 others in the home of the sculptor Adol Doucher, in Augsburg, on Easter Sunday, 1528. After his trial in which he gave a clear and complete testimony he was sentenced "from life to death" by the city court. Hans cried out at once: "No indeed, gentlemen of Augsburg, but from death to life!" causing great fear to come upon the people. They beheaded him on April 25, 1528, and after burning holes through their cheeks they banished the rest, including his wife and two children, the youngest of which was five months old. Hans was a young man and a leader in the church community. He had been baptized for almost a year.

¹¹ *Opera Omnia Theologica*, Amsterdam, 1681

¹² From A. Hulshof *Geschiedenis van de Doopsgezinden te Straatsburg van 1525 tot 1557*, Amsterdam, 1905.

¹³ *Rechenschaft*, 1540

¹⁴ *Geschichtbuech*

Concerning the keeping of special days, there is no day more holy than another. Sunday is the day appointed to get together, preach the Gospel, and discuss it. But people are misusing it now and spending the day as free time to do evil deeds.¹⁵

Wolfgang von Moos, testifying at Vill near Neumarkt in South Tyrol, simply said he believed nothing about keeping special feasts, Sundays, and holidays other than what is written about them in the New Testament.

Ethics on Test

Jesus warned his disciples against doing good works to be seen of men. At the same time, He told them to do good works so that others would see them and glorify God. The Anabaptists, facing both challenges, drew unusual observations from their enemies. Ulrich Zwingli, after calling the Anabaptists *satanas in angelos Jucis conversos*,¹⁶ wrote in 1527:

Their life and conduct seem at first impression irreproachable, pious, unassuming, attractive, yes, above this world. Even those who are inclined to be critical will say that their lives are excellent.¹⁷

A Reformed pastor of Appenzell in Switzerland said:

The Anabaptists are people who at first had been our best propagators of the Word of God.¹⁸

Other reformed preachers from the canton of Bern informed the Swiss court in 1532:

The Anabaptists have the semblance of outward piety to a far

greater degree than we and all the churches that unitedly confess Christ with us. They avoid offensive sins that are very common among us.¹⁹

These facts disturbed Heinrich Bullinger, a leader of the Swiss Reformed church, very much. He wrote several books against the “shameless rabble” (the Anabaptists) in which he said:

Those who unite with them will be received into their church by rebaptism for repentance and newness of life. Then they lead their lives under a semblance of a quite spiritual conduct. They denounce covetousness, pride, profanity, the lewd conversation, and immorality of the world. They shun drinking and gluttony. In short, their hypocrisy is great and manifold.²⁰

The Jesuit priest, Christoph Andreas Fischer, leader of the Counter-reformation in Austria, spoke of the Anabaptists:

They call each other brothers and sisters. They use no profanity nor harsh speech. They do not swear nor carry weapons. In the beginning, they would not even carry knives. They are modest in eating and drinking. They do not wear stylish clothes. They do not go to law before the magistrates, but they suffer everything in make-believe patience.²¹

In 1582, Franz Agricola, Roman Catholic theologian of the Dutch province of Limburg, wrote in his book *Against the Terrible Errors of the Anabaptists*:

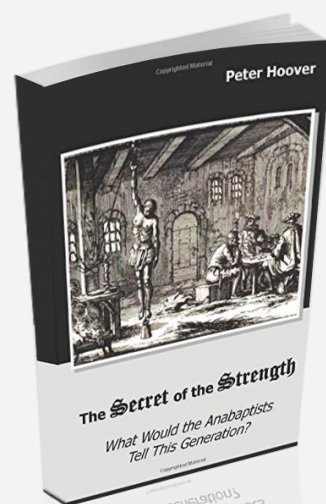
Among the existing heretical sects,

there is none which in appearance leads a more modest or pious life than the Anabaptists. They are irreproachable in their outward public life. They do not say lies. They do not deceive, swear, fight, nor speak harshly. They avoid intemperate eating and drinking. No personal outward display is found among them, but humility, patience, uprightness, neatness, honesty, temperance and straightforwardness in such measure that one would suppose they had the Holy Spirit of God!²²

Following Christ into an ethical lifestyle, the first Anabaptists moved...

²¹ Some of the books written by this man against the Bruderhöfe in Moravia are *Von der Wiedertaufer Verfluchtem Ursprung, Gottlosen Lehre, und Derselben Gründliche Widerlegung*, 1603 (The Cursed Origin of the Anabaptists, Their Godless Doctrine, and its Thorough Refutation), *Der Hutterischen Wiedertaufer Taubenkobel in Welchem all ihr Mist, Kot und Unflat zu Linden ist...* 1607 (The Hutterite Anabaptist Pigeon House in which all Their Manure, Mud, and Garbage is to be Found...), and *54 Erhebliche Ursachen Warum die Wiedertaufer nicht sein im Lande zu Leiden...* 1607 (54 Valid Reasons Why the Anabaptists Cannot be Tolerated in the Land).

²² From *Erster Evangelischer Prozess Wider Allerlei Grausame Irrtümer der Wiedertäufer*, (Köln, 1582).



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¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ devils transformed into angels of light

¹⁷ From *In Catabaptistarum Strophas Elenchus*, 1527.

¹⁸ Walter Klarer, quoted in J.J. Simmler, *Sammlung alter und neuer Urkunden*, (Zurich, 1757).

¹⁹ W. J. McGlothlin, *Die Bemer Täufer bis 1532*, (Berlin, 1902).

²⁰ From *Der Wiedertäufer Ursprung, führung, secten, wäsen, fürnemme und gemeine*, 1535.

It all started in **Genesis 12:1**:

“Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country... unto a land that I will shew thee.”

From that point on, over the next **25 years**, the Lord and Abraham met off and on. Most of the time, God was reminding and reconfirming His promise:

“I will make of thee a great nation.”

Years passed. Then, even more years passed. Abraham’s faith grew weak. He stumbled a few times. Innocent people got hurt. But...

God kept reminding Abraham of His promise. Still **no child**. Eventually, Abraham and Sarah laughed. They said something like, *“We’re almost 100 years old! This promise of God is starting to feel like a joke.”*

Abraham veered off course and went down to Egypt. This is where they may have picked up Hagar. Later, when Sarah gave up and wanted to stop playing God’s game, she handed her Egyptian maid, Hagar, to her husband, saying, *“Go ahead. Try to have a child with her instead.”*

And we all know how that turned out. **What a mess. What pain came from it!** But God wasn’t done. The story kept going.

It was long. It was hard. It didn’t make sense for years. But in the end, it would all come together. And finally... it did. **25 years later**, after a long wait and much water under the bridge, **God spoke again**.

This time, He said to Abraham, *“Come with me. You’re ready now. It’s time for the test.”* The truth is, Abraham would not have been ready for this test **even a year earlier**. But now, after all the waiting, all the tears, the detours, and all the lessons, **he was ready**.

“And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him” (Gen 22:3)

When they approached the mountain, Abraham told the two young men to stay behind. Then he said these powerful words:

“I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.”

Did you catch that? **“We’ll come again to you.”** That’s faith talking.

As they climbed the mountain, Isaac asked, *“Father, we have the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb?”*

Abraham replied,

“My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering.”

So the two of them, **Abraham and Isaac**, walked on together, step by step, up the mountain. The conversation likely consisted of only a few brief exchanges. It may have been near dead silence. Who knows for sure?

They reached the place God had told Abraham about. And then... **Abraham built the altar**. He laid out the wood, just like a burnt offering required. And then, with hands probably trembling, **he tied up his son Isaac** and laid him on the altar.

This was his promised son. The one he had waited 25 years for. The one God said would bring a nation. And now God was asking him to give that son back.

Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife. He was ready to obey, **even if it may have felt embarrassing, even if it broke his heart**.

But right at that moment, something happened:

“And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.

And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God...” (Gen 22:11-12)

Can you imagine the relief? The tears? The joy?

Abraham looked up... And there in the bushes, caught by its horns, was a **ram**. God had provided, **just as Abraham had said He would**.

He untied Isaac. They took the ram and offered it instead.

That mountain was no longer just a mountain. It was a place of deep faith. A place of **trust, tested and proven**. And Abraham gave that place a name:

“And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen” (Gen 22:14).

**Jehovah-Jireh means
“The Lord will provide.”**

What can we learn?

- God’s promises may take time, **but they are sure**.
- Our detours, doubts, and delays don’t cancel God’s plan.
- Sometimes the test comes when we least expect it, **but God knows when we’re ready**.

When we trust God fully, we’ll find He already has a **ram in the thicket**, a way of escape, a miracle, a provision.

The author invites you to text or call with questions or comments!
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Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1).

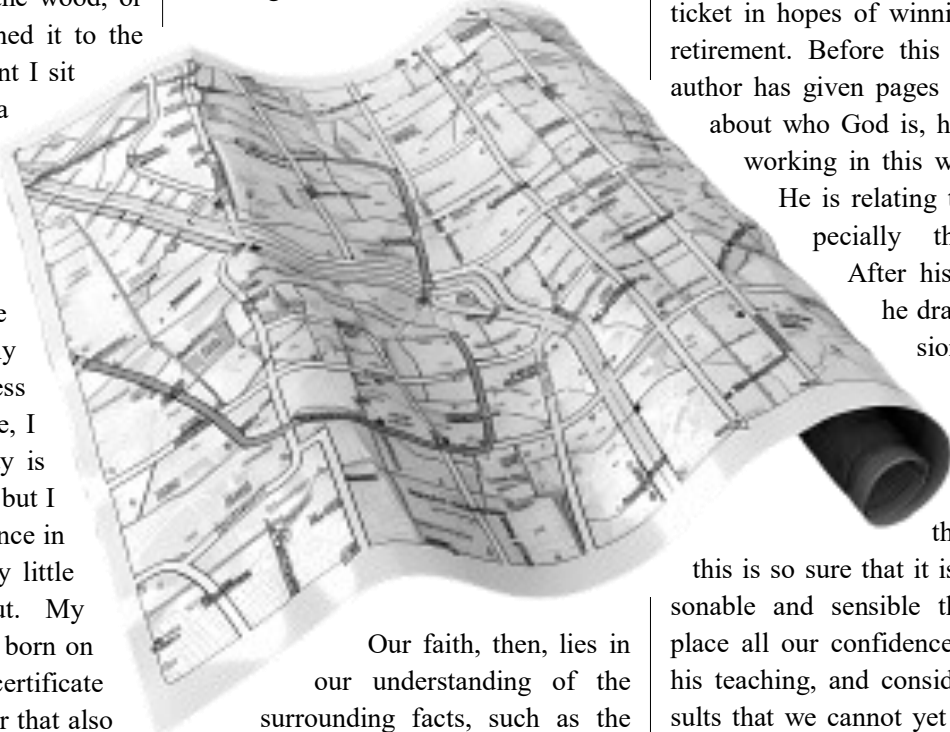
What is faith, and how can it be a confidence and assurance of what is not seen? A basic definition of faith is that it is a confidence or belief in the reality of a certain object. However, this definition still leaves many unanswered questions.

There are few things in this world that we can see or understand the entire reality of. There are often some aspects that we have to have some degree of faith in that will hold up to a consistent pattern of our past experiences, or in our knowledge of the things it is made of. Take, for instance, a wooden chair. Based on my knowledge of wood, its typical strength, and the way it is constructed, I can have faith that it will hold my weight when I sit on it. It usually does. But I cannot say with total certainty that it will support me, since there might be a knot in the wood, or termites may have weakened it to the point it collapses the instant I sit on it. Still, I can sit on a chair with a high degree of confidence that I will be supported.

While this may be a very visible example of faith, we regularly put faith in many things that we have far less certainty about. All my life, I have said that my birthday is on a certain day in March, but I am putting a lot of confidence in something that I have very little factual information about. My parents told me that I was born on that day, and I have a certificate written by a medical doctor that also says it. But it would have been fairly

easy for my parents and a doctor to change the date on which I was born, and I would have a very difficult time proving otherwise.

The date of my birth is a small matter and of very little consequence if my faith in being born on that day is incorrect. But we regularly put our faith, or our strong convictions, of reality being a certain way on things that matter a lot more to everyday life, and with just as little evidence. We look up a place on a map or put an address into a GPS and follow the directions to a place we have never seen before, and quite possibly no one we know personally has been there. Given the countless number of ways technology can malfunction and the countless ways that humans try to deceive one another, it would be reasonable to think that the place we are going to may not exist. But we still set off towards it, and are very surprised when our journey gets interrupted, and would be shocked if the place we are traveling to didn't exist.



Our faith, then, lies in our understanding of the surrounding facts, such as the reliability of the mapmakers and the

GPS, as well as information about the place we are going to and many other factors along the way. We gather the information, sift through it with our understanding of reality, and then decide how reasonable it is to trust the collection of information and act accordingly.

It is quite possible to have incorrect perceptions or ideas about reality, and therefore go down harmful paths. Some have thought that consuming lead would help them stay young, and so they put their faith in that understanding and regularly consumed lead. Having faith, or acting in faith, does not mean that the faith is well-placed and will provide the person with what they are aiming for. It means that the person had considered the factors and is confident to take action towards that end.

When the writer of Hebrews gives this statement of what faith is, he is not talking about a random possibility of something, such as buying a lottery ticket in hopes of winning enough for retirement. Before this statement, the author has given pages of information

about who God is, how He is seen working in this world, and how

He is relating to humans, especially through Jesus.

After his case is built, he draws the conclusion that given all these facts and information about the reality of things, a faith in

this is so sure that it is the most reasonable and sensible thing to do to place all our confidence in Jesus, and his teaching, and consider the end results that we cannot yet see, as if they had already happened, just as promised.

The Bible teaches that a person is either lost OR saved (born again, if you prefer).

“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. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? Jesus answered, 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” (Jn 3:35).

There is no “middle” or “almost.” It is w either saved or lost. Period.

If you are saved, then ALL your sins are forgiven (1 Cor 6:11, Eph 4:32, Col 2:13, Col 3:13). You will know that you are a son of God because He puts His Spirit in you (Ro 8:16, Gal 4:6, 2 Cor 1:22, 1 Jn 5:13, 1 Jn 4:13, Jn 14:17, and 1 Cor 2:12).

If a person isn't saved or a believer (Jn 3:18, 2 Cor 2:3-4, 1 Cor 2:14), then he is lost, cannot understand spiritual things, and his sins are NOT forgiven!

“For the wages of sin is death; but the GIFT of God is ETERNAL LIFE through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Ro 6:23).

No sins will make it into heaven! It is impossible for a human being on this earth to not sin within his own power (Ecc 7:20, Ro 3:10,23). It doesn't matter who you are, the same rule applies to all (Ro 2:11, Acts 10:34).

It doesn't matter if a person is Catholic, Jehovah's Witness, Mormon, Amish or Mennonite, etc. If a person is trusting in ANYTHING besides Jesus Christ, then that person is trying to serve two mas-

ters (gods), and that is impossible! (Mtt 6:24, Lk 16:13).

Jesus was very serious when he said the following in John 14:6:

“...I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

“Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Cor 15:1-4).

This is the Gospel and the way to salvation for everyone in this present age of grace. NOTHING can be added. It does not matter who you are (denomination) or were you came from. The same truth applies to everyone!

“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” (Ro 10:9).

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Ro 10:13).

How could a person confess and believe after he is dead? This decision must be made now, not in the future after a person is dead. By then it will be too late.

“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” (Eph 2:8-9).

That's third grade English and is very plain and simple!

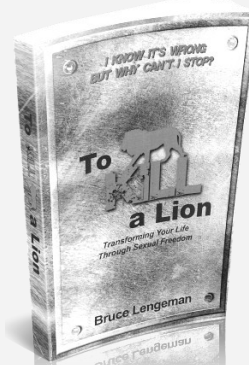
We have established that a person MUST have salvation (be born again, or saved) on this earth BEFORE they die, or it will be too late. We have also established that there is only ONE WAY to heaven, and that is through JESUS CHRIST (Jn 14:6)!

Ephesians 4:5 states there is “One Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Holy Spirit baptism (1 Cor 12:13) into Christ, not water.

There are not many ways to heaven, but only one! Anyone who says differently is telling a lie that is from the devil!

Salvation does not come through a certain dress code or a bunch of manmade rules. You might say, “Well, those things are keeping us safe.” That, my friend, is trusting in another god (idol), not Jesus Christ!

END



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The Radical Reformation began with men who boldly stood up for what they knew was Biblical truth. They were willing to speak fearlessly and even to die for what they believed. Somewhere through the generations since then, however, we have changed to become a people imprisoned by fear. We became the “quiet in the land” so that we would no longer need to fear losing our lives or our families. We began standing for values that were also motivated by fear. We fear losing our culture. We fear our children will lose their heritage of plainness. We fear outsiders may have a greater influence on us than we do on them. We fear teaching on the Holy Spirit; we fear hearing the voice of God because of what it could lead to.

Many of our rules are developed out of fear of what things may lead to. We fear that God’s standards as outlined in Scripture are not enough to keep our people, so we add fences around them to make sure we don’t break any commandments. We fear being questioned about some of those rules that we don’t really have a Biblical answer for, so too often our response is anger at those who question the rules.

Fear is rooted in not trusting God. Fear manifests itself in attempting to control whatever situation we feel insecure or powerless in. But the One who is actually in control wants us to stop trying to do what He never meant for us to do. Only He can take away our fear of “what might happen” if we don’t do everything in our power to keep our people where they need to be.

It is time for us to take a radical, fearless stand once again for Truth. We have access to Truth, and that Truth is enough. Nothing more, nothing less.

We will see the beginnings of real change occurring among our Anabaptist people when leaders begin stepping up to fearlessly lead the charge. I have

heard leaders say, “I believe we are not aligned with Scripture in the way we refuse communion to other believers who worship with us, but it’s no use trying to change it. Our people are not ready for change like that.”

My response is “Why not?”

Fearful Sheep

When a shepherd leads his sheep to a regular spot to feed, and suddenly realizes that there are plants growing that are toxic to his sheep, he leads them to a different spot to feed—whether or not the sheep want to change their grazing spot. Sheep that trust their shepherd will follow even if it is outside of their normal routine. If a shepherd cannot lead his sheep away from their normal routine, he does not have their hearts or their trust.



This can happen when a shepherd does not spend enough time with his sheep. In Bible times, a shepherd’s duty was to lead his sheep to good places to graze and drink, and to fend off animals that came to attack the sheep. He was with his sheep constantly and was a familiar, trusted person to them. They kept close and followed willingly because they knew he loved them and would look out for their best interests.

In the western world today, sheep are often kept in fenced-in pastures. The sheep are familiar with their shepherd, but the relationship is much different. They may only see their shepherd occasionally. The fences that are erected keep out dangers and keep them where they need to be. The shepherd’s main job is to make sure there is water and

food available to them. The shepherd can have another job and there is no need to be with the sheep constantly. This arrangement works fine until something changes in the routine. When it comes time for sheering the sheep, or needing to herd them somewhere for any reason; these shepherds have a much more difficult task than shepherds of long ago did.

It seems that we have traded in the Biblical model for shepherding our Anabaptist churches for a more westernized version. Our shepherds must earn a living since they can not make a living being a shepherd, so they have no other option but to build fences to keep their flocks where they need to be. They check in when they can and make sure food and water is available, but they can’t be available to their flocks all the time because they must be out earning their living. This arrangement works until anything out of the ordinary happens. How far can we really trust our leader when he wants to do something different than what we have been doing most of our lives?

I have recently been hearing about and observing an Anabaptist congregation that has made some incredible changes in the past ten years. This was once a small, struggling congregation from a more liberal conference and there was very little life left in the flock. A new leader took charge who wished to lead them to a more Biblical mind set. Without making a single outward rule about dress or head coverings, this congregation is now a flock that is a thriving, Spirit-filled, Biblical church that has grown and is continually adding to their flock. They are reaching out and making a huge impact on their community.

The first thing Anabaptists always want to know is whether or not the head covering is practiced, so I will address that first. When the new pastor came in, there were only a few who practiced it, but most did not. Now ten years later, about eighty percent of them do.

However, people don't all look alike. There are many different colors, shapes, and sizes of head coverings. There are different people with many different styles of clothing. People from the community have begun attending and have gotten saved and have turned away from lives of sin and bondage. Lives are changing and the Holy Spirit is present and noticeably at work.

So what is the point I am trying to make?

Shepherding Without Fences

Here is a church that is doing what our typical Anabaptists churches say is impossible. We are told it's impossible to keep a church where they need to be without extra rules. Without fences in place to keep the sheep where they belong, we know that the flock will all be scattered. And when you look at the American model of raising sheep, that is a valid point. Sheep that are used to being fenced in will scatter if they suddenly have their fences removed.

But what if we were to ask shepherds from Bible times if they needed fences to keep their sheep from scattering? They would probably tell you that most of the sheep stay right with their shepherd and follow him wherever he goes. The ones that wander off are noticed and brought back by a vigilant shepherd that stays tuned in to his sheep and knows them all by name.



So why do we shepherd with a fenced-in model when the other is more likely what Jesus had in mind when He told Peter to tend and shepherd His sheep?

"So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas,

lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17).

This was also the only model Peter and Paul knew of when they spoke of elders shepherding the church.

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

"The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:1-3).

Could it be that one of the reasons the "fenced-in model" is the one we use is because we don't pay our shepherd/pastors?

"Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. For the scripture saith, thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward" (1Tim. 5:17-18).

"Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with

the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:13-14).

When our shepherd/pastors are forced to be only part-time shepherds because they must still work another job to earn a living, they can't be available to their sheep/congregation all the time. Therefore, they must use fences like American shepherds do who can't be with their sheep constantly. And in doing it this way, they cannot spend the time needed to build the type of relationship with the individuals in their congregations that they would otherwise.

Fences are fine until change is needed or a shepherd must take his flock through uncharted territory. Will the flock have enough trust in their shepherd to follow?

So back to the previously mentioned church... This church has a full-time, paid pastor who is devoted to his sheep. He pours into them. He is a man filled with the Holy Ghost and power who feeds, prays, weeps, and rejoices with his flock. They know him well and he has their hearts. When he began to preach Scripture that went against what they had been practicing for a long time, they followed because they knew it was truth (Titus 1:9) and they trusted that he had their best interests in mind.

He didn't try to control people with truth by making rules to force them to comply. Rather, he loved them truthfully by speaking and teaching truth and allowing the Holy Spirit to convict. When people were contentious with him, he showed love, but did not change his stand for truth. Those that aligned themselves with Scripture did it because it was truth, and because they found freedom in living that truth. This is different than obeying because of a fence erected to force obedience. Is this not shepherding like Jesus did?

Think of Jesus speaking truth to Peter when Peter was stubborn— He didn't try to force Peter to change. He spoke truth and allowed Peter to learn, even if that

meant the hard way. When His disciples argued over who should be the greatest, Jesus didn't try to force them to change. He spoke truth, set an example, and gave God room to work in their hearts. Jesus didn't try to force Judas to change; He didn't try to control Thomas's doubt but dealt truthfully and patiently with him. This is the example of shepherding that under-shepherds need to imitate.

This is radical shepherding.

In Need of a Shepherd

People are most like sheep in their yearning for a shepherd that will care for them. There is something deep inside that longs for someone we can trust who will walk ahead of us—leading us in safety and caring about what happens to us. We were created for a Shepherd. The shepherd model is found already in the Old Testament where we find God referred to as a Shepherd long before people dared to call Him Father. The fact that Psalm 23 is such a well-known and favored passage of Scripture shows us how much people today still crave a shepherd.

Today's generation may not care for church politics, creeds, traditions, or ceremonies, but they still respond to a shepherd who reaches out to them with a heart of love. Rebellious young people who want nothing to do with rules will still respond to love and acts of kindness from a gentle shepherd.

Jesus called Himself "the Good Shepherd" and set an example of what shepherding is to look like. He was willing to leave a life of glory to live a humble life of servanthood among His sheep. His shepherding brought forth healthy mature sheep who then became under-shepherds to other sheep. And those shepherds did the same.

God is still the Great Shepherd that walks ahead of His sheep. Under-shepherds are still to lead the sheep as they follow Him. However, throughout the Old Testament, we read of under-shepherds who failed in their role of

shepherding. There are numerous references in which the prophets chastise shepherds who are not leading their flocks right or are allowing them to scatter with no attempt to search for them. (Jer. 50: Ezek.34)

I have seen good Anabaptist under-shepherds who loved and led their flocks well. I have also witnessed shepherds who do not seem to understand what being a shepherd means. In moving away from the New Testament model seen first in Jesus, and then in His disciples, they become more like rulers and dictators than shepherds. When shepherds think their job is more about making laws and discipline and forcing obedience, they become tyrants instead, wanting sovereignty over their kingdoms.

The goal of shepherding is to have healthy, full grown sheep to present to the Great Shepherd someday. Many of our leaders look at their sound flocks and confidently look forward to presenting them. And we do have a lot of healthy churches.



But what about all those sheep that we have lost?

One of the greatest failures of Anabaptist shepherd leaders today is in overlooking the aspect of being a shepherd who is not only a leader, but also a rescuer. Sheep wander from the herd and get lost easily. They make many foolish

decisions and get separated from the flock. But they cannot survive alone. They need a rescuer.

We like to show off our healthy flocks, our obedient sheep, our many sweet lambs within the fold. People take note of how our sheep are well groomed, well-behaved, and we have very few visible trouble makers. We have a great culture and we like to boast that we have healthier flocks than most other denominations.

But why do we?

Have we culled out the weak and sickly? Do we turn our backs on the ones who wander off? Do we chase off the ones who question rules or rebel? Do we have more of a "survival of the fittest" mind set than we realize in our efforts to gain a utopian society/culture?

We are not following the Great Shepherd's example of being a Rescuer and Great Physician for the sheep. Jesus said He was sent unto the "*lost sheep*" (Matt. 15:24), and when He sent out His disciples, He told them to Go rather to the "*lost sheep*" (Matt. 10:6). When the Pharisees questioned Him for being with publicans and sinners, He said, "*they that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*" (Luke 5:31-32). He spoke of a shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep in his flock to search for one that wandered off. He spoke of a woman sweeping and searching her entire house in her efforts to find what was lost. There can be no doubt that His purpose, His heart, was to lost, straying, disobedient, sickly sheep.

How can we disregard His example? How can we think it is more important to keep our healthy, well-groomed flocks than it is to go after our straying sheep?

Faithfully preaching and feeding the faithful, obedient sheep in our flock is not enough. We must care about the unhealthy or straying sheep, and go to extreme measures for them. We must

learn how to treat a sick conscience, care for hurting bleeding hearts, apply balm to wounds, and speak healing words to grief-stricken people.

We cannot take a personal affront at sheep who make rebellious choices. We can't harbor resentment at their foolish choices. We can't be nettled at their backsliding and lagging behind the rest. We can't allow thoughts of relief when they have left the herd and are no longer our problem.

"But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd" (Matt. 9:36).

Do we even care about the sheep that are scattered and no longer have a shepherd? Where is our compassion for those who once were part of a flock but because of their own wanderings no longer have a shepherd? Do we say within ourselves, "They are the ones who chose to leave. They know the door is open and they can come back anytime they choose to. It's their own fault for making these choices. Let them find out how hard it is."

Why have we closed our hearts to those who do not agree with us on every point? Where is our compassion? Why aren't our hearts wounded at the loss of even one sheep? Why aren't we weeping over them as Jesus wept? Why are we so complacent when Jesus was willing to lay down His life for that very one that we have decided is not worth our efforts?

Jesus sought out those wasted lives. He sent the "bench-warmers" (the inactive ones) to work in the vineyards. He befriended the rebellious, disobedient ones (the publicans and sinners) by sitting and building relationships with them. He broke down the walls built around those in His midst with slightly differing viewpoints (the Samaritans) by not keeping the traditions of His people. His kindness to one Samaritan woman captured the heart of an entire nation!

Why are we content to groom our healthy herd when reaching even one lost individual is what Jesus would rather we do? Do we not care that scattered, hungry, needy sheep will follow false shepherds or have their very life snuffed out by wolves?

We don't need platform speakers who wax eloquent. We don't need more heavy-handed leaders with bigger rule books and doctrinal statements. We need shepherds who love sheep. We need shepherds who talk with, commune with, sacrifice themselves for, and win the hearts of their sheep. We need shepherds with a gentle approach, a sympathetic touch, full of the Holy Spirit who persuade tenderly with the Word of God. We need shepherds who are willing to carry the young or broken when it is needed, shepherds that are willing to sacrifice themselves for the needs of their flock.

A shepherd who regards himself as being in a separate class than those in his flock has forgotten that he, too, is a sheep. If a shepherd is cynical or dislikes his sheep, he is not spending enough time with them. It is in spending time with his sheep that he will see what they are facing and face it with them. He will understand what their suffering is because he suffers with them. He will care about their plight because close contact stirs the heart.

A shepherd needs to be with his sheep so much that he smells like them. He must know his sheep and what their needs are so his sermons can be timely and relevant. He must have many conversations with them so he can speak their language when he preaches. He must be so attached to them that when danger comes, he won't even think of himself but only the safety of his sheep.

A shepherd like this holds the hearts of his sheep. Sheep motivated by a shepherd they love will follow willingly and be devoted to him because they know they are loved. Even a rebel who tears a rule book to shreds will respond to acts of kindness and love shown by a shepherd who has time for him.

Shepherds will be asked to give account for the sheep God has given them (Heb. 13:17). He didn't overlook the shepherds' lack of care for the lost sheep of Israel and He will not overlook it today. Someday every shepherd will stand before God and hear the words asked to Peter. Did you feed my lambs? Did you tend my sheep? Did you feed my sheep?

"The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them. Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord; As I live, saith the Lord God, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock; Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them."

Ezekiel 34:4-10

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November

Better Together (part 4 of 6)

When we do not understand the purpose of marriage, we can abuse, misuse, or frustrate marriage. In this message, Brother Duane shares the biblical purpose of marriage.

Q&A with Haley and Dustin

Haley and Dustin discuss how to cope with depression, practical do's and don'ts for helping others struggling with mental health issues, as well as tips for reigniting your relationship with God during a spiritually dry season of life.

Grieving with Hope

Haley and Dustin share biblical truths that can anchor you in times of grief. They discuss their personal stories of loss, misconceptions about grief, and provide practical guidance on what it looks like to grieve with hope and help others who are mourning a loss.

James 1:22-25

James 1:22 says, "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves." In this study, Dr. J. Vernon McGee explains how Christians can take these words to heart and put them into practice in our everyday lives.

December

Better Together (part 5 of 6)

According to the apostle Paul, marriage is a great mystery and refers to the husband as a type of Christ and the wife as a type of church or the bride of Christ. In this message, Brother Duane Sheriff teaches that respect is important to a man and love is important to a woman.

Hope Talks **How to Manage Your Anger**

What do you do when you're angry? How do you get it under control? Haley and Dustin share how you can uncover the roots of your anger and provide practical steps from God's Word on how to manage your anger.

Christmas Message (Parts 1 and 2)

We are going to bring you a special message for Christmas today, and I want to let you know that this message is probably a bit different than most of the Christmas messages you are used to hearing. This world is enveloped in darkness. Have you noticed that? It's getting worse by the year. Jesus is the reason we celebrate Christmas, but you certainly wouldn't know it if you turn on the TV or cruise around the internet. So, what are we to think of this? What are we to do? Pastor Bill Henry will take us to several scriptures, but start in Isaiah chapter nine.

January

Better Together (part 6 of 6)

Brother Duane Sheriff concludes the Better Together conference by explaining the contrast between a contract and a covenant.

Grace Under Fire **Answering Tough Questions (1 of 2)**

Let's face it—grace makes people nervous. If you say you're totally forgiven someone is bound to ask, "So... sin doesn't matter anymore?" Mention freedom from the Law, and suddenly you're accused of tossing out morality. Message by Andrew Farley

A Life-Giving Relationship with God (part 1 of 4)

Do you long to keep the love, spark, and intimacy alive in your marriage? Chip Ingram identifies four relationships that great marriages have in common... and why they're vital for you and your spouse.

Get Out of Your Head: Taking Every Thought Captive

The Apostle Paul commands us to take every thought captive. But what does that look like in our fast-paced society where we're constantly bombarded by everything? Don't miss how we can guard our minds against toxic thoughts that threaten to destroy us. Message by Jennie Allen.

This publishing work is registered as a charitable organization in the USA. We welcome your articles, testimonies, and questions. We reserve the right to edit or decline any material and are not responsible for the return of any articles. The cost to print and distribute *The Amish Voice* is \$.75 a copy and is totally funded by readers from across our great country who appreciate the ministry and care to support it. If the Lord would lay it on your heart to come alongside of us by helping with expenses, it would be a great benefit, as well as highly appreciated. Thank you. —Joe Keim, Executive Director

Feedback and Response

1

I have seen a copy of *Amish: Our Friends, but Are They Believers?* As is true everywhere, some are saved and some are not. This was ME, sitting under and teaching in a major denomination for many, many years. I missed the point entirely by being consumed with “religion.” When the HOLY SPIRIT finally opened my eyes, I went to our priest with the question, “Just what is the gospel?” I received no real answer.

Think about it. Just because you go through seminary, you are deemed “approved” to be in a pulpit. Does this occur in churches today? Yes! It is a mistake to write off any Christian denomination. It is also a mistake to assume everyone who labels themselves as “Christian” is saved (Mt 7:21-22). Combine this with James 2:14-18. It boils down to motive (Ro 7:6, 22-25). Your motive must be faith in God, with love for GOD, followed by a willing sanctification, which transfers ownership of self to God (Ro 12:1-2).

I have talked with many Amish who get it. At the end of one discussion, an Amish neighbor commented, “It is all about Jesus!” The Spiritual Amish wish to disciple the others. They put more emphasis on humility than the English. This carries over into seeking God in all things (Acts 17:24-31). Many of them KNOW it is FAITH in Jesus that initiates a relationship with JESUS, built on love for JESUS and a desire to please HIM out of LOVE. Do they all “get it”? Sadly, no. But a parallel question, “How many of us miss it?”

Just some thoughts to consider. Sincerely, in Christian love, with prayer, L. Miller, NY

Dear L. Miller,

Thank you for taking the time to write and for sharing your thoughts after reading *Amish: Our Friends, but Are They Believers?* I truly appreciate your heart for the Amish people and the reminder that salvation is never found in religion, tradition, a list of dos and don'ts, or a denomination, but only in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus Himself said in John 5:24: “*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.*”

You are right that this truth applies everywhere. Many good, hard-working, and upright men and women sit in church services, and even preach in pulpits, yet miss Jesus Christ Himself.

“*Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not **prophesied** in thy*

*name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I **never** knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity*” (Mt 7:22-23).

We are also overjoyed to see what God is doing in the hearts of some of the more conservative Amish and Mennonite churches that strayed from the truth generations ago. Many of the younger generation are feeling the hopelessness of following a system of rules and traditions. They are asking questions and searching for real, authentic Christianity. God is opening their eyes to the truth of salvation. Many are getting saved! Some choose to stay in their culture, which is alright, because salvation in Jesus is not based on what culture we belong to. Others choose to leave the culture, and that is alright too, for again, salvation is not based on culture and traditions.

The Bible is very clear that ordinances, rules, and laws cannot save us. In fact, God's Word says: “*Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross*” (Col 2:14). Christ alone is our salvation. It is never about keeping a system, but about knowing the Savior who gave Himself for us.

The booklet *Amish: Our Friends, but Are They Believers?* was never written to “write off” the Amish, but to lovingly point out, as you have, that salvation is not found in culture, simplicity, humility, or good works, but only in Christ and His finished work on the cross. I am thankful, as you shared, that there are Amish who do understand this truth and boldly declare, “It is all about Jesus!” What a wonderful testimony.

With Christian love, Joe Keim
Call or Text: (419) 651-6813

2

Thank you for the great articles in *The Amish Voice*. I can agree with most of it, especially stories of the plain old gospel message of our Lord Jesus Christ! He really does change hearts and lives! Please accept our donation so that more people will get to hear about the real Jesus Christ and that He wipes our slate clean of all sins, and not only so, He also delivered us from the power of sin so we don't have to live any longer therein, all because of what He did, not what we have done!! —AAB, KY

Several years ago, I heard the preacher man mention that things really went to pot in this country about the time that women started wearing pants. Interesting, I thought. I know technology and evil have accelerated in the last seventy or eighty years or so, but really, pants? We always like to blame people and objects for our faults.

Can we go back a spell and look into the Bible? We will see that things went to pot long before women started wearing pants. Six chapters into the Bible, God was grieved that He had made us. That's pretty bad.

They had no pants, no smartphone, and no TikTok; just trees, sticks, stones,

and things of that sort. Maybe a few heffalumps were walking the earth. Six chapters into the Bible, and the people were committing many sins. People's thoughts were only evil continually. According to the Bible, God was grieved and sorry He had made us.

"And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart" (Gen 6:5-6).

So what did God do?

He set out to save us just as He knew He would before He ever made us. He sent His Son to bring us back, and this time He would birth us anew. He would put Himself in us so He could live His good life through us.

And that, my friend, is good Christian living. God living in and through people. Our job is to flow with Him.

So what about women wearing pants?

I am confident our good, Godly women can figure out what to wear. God has filled His women with His Spirit. The Holy Spirit will teach them. I challenge all to walk right and holy.

Phone Sermon Series Distracted: Galatians

series by Andrew Farley—<https://andrewfarley.org>

The book of Galatians is a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to churches in the region of Galatia, warning them not to turn away from the true gospel of Jesus Christ. False teachers were convincing them they needed to keep the Old Testament law, like circumcision, to be right with God, but Paul firmly taught that salvation comes only by God's grace through faith in Jesus, not by works. He also reminded them that believers are set free from the law's bondage to live by the Spirit. Galatians makes it clear that the Christian life is about faith working through love, not about keeping a list of rules. Available through the end of 2026.



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What Just Spilled?

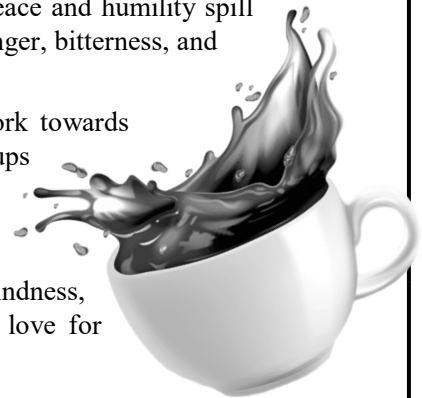
You are holding a cup of coffee when someone bumps into you, making you spill your coffee everywhere. Why did you spill the coffee? You spilled the coffee because there was coffee in your cup.

Whatever is inside the cup is what will spill out.

When life comes along and shakes you (which will happen), whatever is inside you will come out. It's easy to fake it, until you get rattled.

So, we have to ask ourselves, "What's in my cup?" When life gets tough, does joy, gratefulness, peace and humility spill out? Or does anger, bitterness, and harsh words?

Today let's work towards filling our cups with gratitude, forgiveness, joy, words of affirmation, kindness, gentleness and love for others.



"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal 5:22-23a).

STEP OUT OF THE BOAT

God rarely keeps us in the same season for long because His desire is for us to grow in our faith and fully depend on Him. What is it like when He calls you to step out of your comfort zone and all you have to hold onto is Him?

One of the best ways to increase our faith is to listen to others relate their story of when they stepped out into the unknown and God did a mighty work in them and through them.

Hebrews 11:6 says: *"But without faith it is impossible to please Him..."*

Faith is the heart of Christianity. Just like your key unlocks the door to your house, so faith is the key that pleases God. By faith, Noah built an ark. By faith, people have been healed of sicknesses. By faith, people have been translated from spiritual death to everlasting life.

Some things I have learned about my faith in God:

- 1) It is very rare that God allows me to see the whole picture at once.
- 2) If I had all the details, it wouldn't require faith and dependency on God.
- 3) Stepping out and into the unknown is often a frightful experience.
- 4) I wonder how many God moments I have missed because I lacked faith and stayed in my comfort zone.
- 5) Some of the greatest and most amazing things that have ever happened in my life is when I stepped out in faith and fully trusted God to hold me.

Won't you join us as we hear from 20 every-day, ordinary people who responded when God beckoned them. If you come expecting God to move in your life, you will leave a changed person, on fire for God!

Must Register!
by March 6

March 18-21, 2026

575 US-250
Greenwich, OH

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Questions? Email us at:
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Ditches

— by John Weaver

Many years ago, my dad was trying to break a young horse. He hitched him to a road cart and went to a neighbor's house who had a long lane. This lane went downhill, then over a wooden bridge that crossed a good-sized creek, and then up another hill to the house.

All went well until the horse's feet touched the wooden bridge floor. Suddenly, there was a sound that was new to the horse. Startled, he looked up and to one side. Seeing the water (there were no sides or rails whatsoever on the wooden bridge), he took one great big leap to get away from the water that had scared him. And, guess what? Yes, he ended up in the other ditch! Horse, cart, dad, and all were in the creek. No one was hurt, but I never forgot the lesson learned from this incident.

Some people are like this young horse. They focus so much on the ditch they are trying to steer clear of that they end up in a ditch that is just as bad as the one they were avoiding in the first place. I tell people, "Remember, for every mile of road, there are two miles of ditch." A ditch is not a good path to travel on.

One of the areas that I have watched people leap from one ditch to another in their spiritual lives is the area concerning grace versus works. Granted, the Amish where I grew up were entirely in the ditch of trying to earn their way to heaven by being a good people, hoping that the good they did would outweigh the bad. I was taught a works-based salvation.

Thanks to our merciful Father, I was born again and my eyes were opened to the truth of salvation. I realized that a person is saved by grace. God's grace.

Verses in scripture became alive.

"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" (Eph 2:8-9).

So, what should I have done with the teaching of works in the spiritual sense? Since works can never save us, they don't matter. Is this biblical? No, it is not.

One Ditch:

To believe our works can save us

The Other Ditch:

To believe works don't matter

NEVER: WORKS FOR SALVATION.

ALWAYS: WORKS BECAUSE OF SALVATION.

A person who has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus and is truly born again will have such a grateful heart that good fruits and good works will flow out. Even though I was taught a works-for-salvation gospel, I don't jump into the ditch on the other side.

Out of a grateful heart for salvation, my goals in life have changed, and changed drastically. I no longer live my life for myself. I count it a blessing and a privilege to work the works of Him who saved me: going into the prisons and ministering; going to the mission field and spending time doing things for others; spending money on those less fortunate; visiting the sick... and always telling them about Jesus.

These things could be considered works. That's fine. I count it as a blessing to be able to do what I can for others. I never give it a thought that it helps to earn my salvation. It doesn't.

In a small way, it does say, "Thank you, Lord, for your unspeakable gift."

