

condemnation before a Holy God was made obvious. I read verses like Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." I knew without a doubt what my wages were. The last part of the verse eluded me. I still thought that somehow, I had to pay God for my sins. Finally it became evident to me, because of my sins, I would not be in heaven and I was going to be in hell forever. I rebelled against God for creating me just to suffer eternal torment. I remember doing my chores around the farm and thinking these dumb animals have it nice, for upon death they will simply cease to exist. I, on the other hand, would be cast into hell and suffer for all eternity.

Those were dark, awful days, but I thank my God for them. He was bringing me to true repentance and to the provision of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. One fine September evening in 2005, I was helping Barb put down the finish on a porch floor at the clinic. We were discussing spiritual issues again which by now were not distasteful to me. She was asking me what I thought would get me to heaven and I answered (as I had always believed) that you have to confess all your sins or God will not let you into heaven. This prompted her to ask, "John, if you committed a sin and before you could ask forgiveness, Christ came back, would you go to hell?" All those months of struggling, of pleading with God, of knowing I was condemned, and those Bible verses which told of righteousness through faith in Christ Jesus came back to me, and almost without thinking I said, "No! I would go to heaven!" Immediately, I knew something had changed. I sat back on my heels for a moment and tried to figure it out. The thought that perhaps I had blasphemed God or the Holy Spirit even crossed my mind. Yet somehow, I knew I had not blasphemed. I felt something different, something new that I had never experienced before. Without analyzing what had happened, I felt at peace with my Creator. I was saved, although it was a long time before I realized it was simply trust in what Jesus had done that had changed my life forever that night. And though I did not know I was saved, I no longer felt condemned before God. It was not long before I was telling

others among the Amish that we could be sure of being in heaven not because of what we do, but because of what Jesus did for us.

Looking back, I marvel once again at God's amazing grace and mercy. I was 37 years old when He reached down into my darkened world and set me free. The peace that I now have with God through my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, is worth more to me than anything the world or any religion has to offer. To know that I will be in heaven because God so loved the world that He gave His only Son to die on the cross for sinful, undeserving mankind still moves my eyes to tears.

What love! What boundless grace is given to men! All are sinners because of Adam, but God has made a way for us to be right with Him. To think that some will never accept being made right with God by faith in Christ alone, but rather depending on something they have done, is the tragedy of the universe.

Oh sinner, make haste! Confess your helplessness before Almighty God. Accept the Savior's finished work on the cross for your sins while there is yet time. Do not wait. You do not know if you can repent tomorrow. Your opportunity for salvation is uncertain. We have no guarantee of tomorrow! Make things right with your Creator now. He will give you new life; you will be a child of God. You will have peace that will pass all understanding. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no person comes unto the Father except by Me." Trust Jesus for your salvation and you, too, will be sure of spending eternity in heaven.

- John Miller

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## Born Again!

### 37 Years of darkness Among the Amish

I was born in western Pennsylvania in the small village of Atlantic. Ours was a typical Amish family. We attended church services every other Sunday which was normal for most Amish. Some of my earliest memories include hearing my grandfather preaching from Romans 8:15, "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Other scriptures I heard were John 3:7, "Ye must be born again," and John 14:6, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me."

The Amish often preach accountability and the need of repentance. Unfortunately, the concept is to try harder to subdue sin. As a result I grew up feeling condemned for I knew I was a sinner. I could not understand why everyone else could be right with God as a result of what they were doing, and here I was, a hypocrite, just pretending to be good.

When I was 16 years old I started what the Amish call "Rumschpringah." Usually this consists of spending time with a group of your peers and being involved in their activities. My friends and I did many things against the church rules and against our parents' wishes. Living in sin made my life miserable and many Monday mornings saw me as a depressed young man wondering why life is so empty. In the spring of 1986, I made a commitment to God and the church to give up my sinful life and to live within the ordinances of the church.

It is a solemn occasion on the one day of the year when young men and women can join an instruction class mandatory for church membership. They are expected to conform to the rules of the church and to shun the ways of the world in dress and manner of life. Most Amish have very strict rules regarding appearance and any deviation from these rules is enough to keep one from being accepted in fellowship.

One of the hardest things for some among the Amish is to submit themselves to the church and obey the ordinances. Because of the turmoil and conflict involved in doing this, many think that when they are finally baptized, this means they are now born-again.

Because the way of salvation is linked to church membership, there is pressure applied in different ways to compel young folks in their late teens to become members. A generally-held belief among the Amish is that if you are old enough to be in the church and do not join, there is a good chance that you are going to hell.

After three months of instruction, everyone in our class was baptized by the bishop pouring a little water over our heads. We were told that now we were clean and new, ready for heaven. I remember having expectations of being happy and sinless, and of being filled with joy. All I felt was emptiness. I understood that nothing had changed and I did not have peace with God. I was sure it was because I had not put forth enough effort and God was not about to reward a slacker like myself who was still a sinner at heart.

Even after we were church members, my friends and I would do some of the things we had done formerly, like going to bars and attending drinking parties. This brought the added problem of hiding our activities from older church members. Although we seldom got caught our guilty consciences would move us to confess our sins before the whole congregation. This supposedly brought forgiveness and cleansing from God.

At an Amish wedding, I met Mary Delagrange, a nice, quiet young lady who ended up becoming my wife. We were married on February 4, 1988. In the years soon after that I was the father of a growing line of boys. Mary and I wanted something better for our children than the drinking, smoking lifestyle of the Amish youth of our area. In the fall of 1999, we moved our family to Potter County in northern Pennsylvania. This was a young Amish community with only nine other families at the time we moved in. We were hoping that because of the slightly different rules and so few other families, our children would not be subjected to the evil influences so common among the Amish.

The years were swiftly passing by; our boys were growing up, yet one thing had not changed. I still recognized my guilt before God and wondered if there was a way for me to be right with God. If there was, I certainly had not found it. Thinking about hell, eternity and the lake of fire terrified me. I knew Christ was coming back and in my mind, I would try to devise a way to hide on the Day of Judgment.

Most of our children were born at home, and soon after moving to Ulysses, PA, we started looking for a midwife. Friends of ours introduced us to Barbara Hawley, a kind and gentle lady. However, it was not long before I discovered she liked to talk about spiritual matters, and about the Lord Jesus Christ. This made me uncomfortable for several reasons. I was afraid she would ask me what we believed and why. I was not sure of either. If we are good enough, I thought, we get to go to heaven, although I knew I was not good.

Soon after our son Daniel was born, the Hawleys opened a natural health clinic a short distance from our house. As I got to know the family better, I recognized they had something I did not possess... peace with God. Whether real or imagined, I did not know, but it was more than I could ever claim. They would talk to me about Jesus, and how we needed to be saved. As Amish, we did not believe a person could know they were saved; we could only hope to make it into heaven. I was very hesitant to talk about this, for we were taught to stay away from people who said they were saved. One day I asked Art, Barb's husband, whether being born again and being saved were the same thing. He assured me it was (which was a help to me) for the Amish would preach that we needed to be born again.

Their daughter, Rebekah, would give us rides to town or wherever we needed to go. She had CD's recorded by Ruth Hanna and would often play them for us. Listening to Ruth Hanna's songs about the Lord Jesus and salvation through faith in Him were compelling and thought-provoking. Rebekah would take opportunity to witness to me about Jesus and justification by faith alone. I did not agree with her but could not be certain she was wrong, for my Amish faith had not brought peace with God.

I started doing some part time work at the clinic for the Hawleys and Barbara would often bring Scripture verses hanging on the walls of the clinic to my attention. Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 5:1 were two in particular that I simply could not understand. Being right with God on the basis of what someone else (the Lord Jesus) had done was a concept foreign to my upbringing. Barbara gave me a KJV New Testament, something I had never owned in my life. We were taught to read only German Bibles as the "English" version did not convey the same meaning. Reading my new Bible was a real eyeopener for me. Art suggested I read in the Gospel of John, which I did, but I found Romans fascinating. A light bulb went on when I read Romans 9:31-33. It was easy to make the comparison between Israel and the Amish. It was made clear to me why I had no peace with God by keeping the church rules. My