



# The Amish Voice

MAP ♦ 575 US Highway 250 ♦ Greenwich, OH 44837 ♦ (419) 962-1515 ♦ November 2024

## The Secret of the Strength

— by Peter Hoover

### CHAPTER 14 On to Community

In the old city of Augsburg in Bavaria, Jakob Wideman decided to follow Jesus in 1527. Augsburg was a wealthy city. The Fuggers, Europe's richest and most powerful bankers lived there. But when Jakob found Jesus, he left money and earthly securities behind. Immediately after his baptism the authorities banished him from the city and he fled with others to Nikolsburg in Moravia.

The Anabaptist movement had swept through Nikolsburg a short time before. Perhaps as many as twelve thousand converts had been baptised. But Jakob Wideman and the refugees from Augsburg did not feel at home among them. Not all the Anabaptists of Nikolsburg had given up their possessions to follow Jesus. Some, like the lords von Liechtenstein, had kept their palaces, their servants, their swords, and their government positions. Jakob and other sincere seekers spoke against this, and within a year there were two Anabaptist congregations in Nikolsburg—the large

*Schwertler* group (those who carry swords) and the *Kleinhäufler* (those of the little heap). In 1528 the *Schwertler* drove the *Kleinhäufler*, under the leadership of Jakob Wideman and Philip Plener, out of the city.

For a long time they walked, leading their children and carrying bundles of bedding and food on their backs. They numbered about 200 people, not



The Castle at Mikulov (Nikolsburg) in Moravia, a province of the Holy Roman Empire that had as little to do with Rome as possible. Already inhabited by two non-Catholic groups, the Utraquists (followers of Jan Hus) and the *Unitas Fratrum* (Unity of Brothers), the town attracted Protestants as early as 1524, and during the 1530s about twelve thousand Anabaptists.

counting children. They walked north past Tannewitz in the direction of Muschau until they came to an abandoned estate called Bogenitz. There they camped for a day and a night.

At Bogenitz, after lifting their hands to heaven and calling on God for help, the *Kleinhäufler* chose Franz Intzinger, Jakob Mändel, Thoman Arbeiter, and Urban Bader to be their ministers of material needs. Jakob Mändel had been the general manager of the estates of the lords von Liechtenstein. Then these four men spread out a coat in front of the people “and everyone with a willing spirit, not out of obligation, threw onto it what he had.”

From this time onward, the *Kleinhäufler* had their things in common. The lords von Kaunitz allowed them to settle in rented buildings in the Moravian town of Austerlitz. Jakob Wideman was their servant of the Word. Ulrich Stadler, another servant, joined him. Philip Plener settled with a community of brothers in the city of Auspitz. Jörg Zauming and Jakob Hutter came with refugees from the mountains of Austria. Dozens, then hundreds and thousands upon thousands of new believers joined these

Moravian communities—Rossitz, Lundenburg, Schäkowitz, Dämberschitz, Pausram, Pellertitz, Rampersdorf, Stignitz, Koblitz, Altenmarkt, Neumühl, Prutschan, Landshut, Nemschitz, and Maskowitz...a steadily growing list of communities, which in thirty years became the home of an estimated 60,000 new Christians.

### Jesus the Founder of Community

Jesus Christ, who lived in community of goods with his disciples, prayed for them and all who would choose to follow Him: *“Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are...that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me”* (John 17:11, 23).

The first Anabaptists surrounded Jesus in community. They shared everything one with another—blessings as well as hardships—and the world saw in them the love of God.

Felix Manz, writing to the Zürich council in the early months of 1525, wrote that immediately after baptizing new believers he “taught them further about love and unity and the holding of all things in common as in the second chapter of Acts.”<sup>1</sup>

Johannes Kessler, wrote about the first Anabaptist congregation in Switzerland:

Now because most of Zollikon was rebaptized and held that they were the true Christian church, they also undertook, like the early Christians, to practice community of temporal goods (as can be read in the Acts of the Apostles). They broke the locks off their doors, chests, and cellars, and ate food

and drink in good fellowship without discrimination.<sup>2</sup>

The joint council of Zürich, Sankt Gallen, and Bern condemned the Anabaptists in 1527. One thing they held against them was their teaching on economics:

They say that no Christian, if he is really sincere, may either give or receive interest on money. They say that all temporal goods are free and common and everyone has full rights to use them. We have been informed by trustworthy people that they often said this in the beginning of their movement, and in this way they got the poor and the simple to join with them.<sup>3</sup>

Sebastian Franck, while describing the Anabaptists, wrote:

As far as one could see they taught nothing but love, faith, and the cross. They broke bread one with another as evidence of their unity and love. They helped each other faithfully as brothers, lending and giving, and they taught that all things should be held in common.<sup>4</sup>

The Anabaptists themselves wrote in their first statement of belief:

The brothers and sisters of this church community shall have no property of their own. Rather, as in the time of the apostles, they shall have all things in common. The property of the church community shall be considered one sole property out of which the poor shall receive every man according to his need. Like in the time of the apostles, no brothers shall be left wanting.<sup>5</sup>

The first statement of belief of the Anabaptists in Austria, written by Leonhard Schiemer, includes this article:

The brothers and sisters shall give themselves body and soul to God in his community. Every gift that God gives shall be held in common after the practice of the apostles and the first Christians. In this way the needy within the community will be taken care of.<sup>6</sup>

Peter Rideman, in a letter to the brothers in Austria wrote:

Truly it is a sure sign—those who leave community of goods and go back to private property walk away from God. They lose their first love, and become enemies of God and thieves of what He gives to us.<sup>7</sup>

### An outer testimony

Spirit baptism is an inner experience, taught the Anabaptists of Moravia. It is not complete until we receive the outer baptism of water. Communion is inner, spiritual union with God. It is not complete until we outwardly partake of the bread and the wine. In the same way, brotherly love is the inner, spiritual union of brothers and sisters in Jesus. It is not complete until we clasp our hands, embrace one another with our arms, and share our outward possessions in Christian community. Where such a materialization of love takes place, the true Gospel of the kingdom has been preached.

Sebastian Franck, one of the Anabaptists’ principle sources of information about the early Christians, helped them understand this type of love. He described how the early Christians lived:

<sup>1</sup> *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz, I: Zürich*, ed. Leonhard von Muralt and Walter Schmid (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag 1952)

<sup>2</sup> *Sabbata...ca. 1530*

<sup>3</sup> From a mandate of the city councils of Zürich, Bern and Sankt Gallen against the Anabaptists, 1527.

<sup>4</sup> *Chronika, Zeybuch und Geschichtsbibel*, 1531

<sup>5</sup> *Christlicher Ordnung...damitt die lieb und einikeit erhalten wird* (Bern, Switzerland, ca. 1526)

<sup>6</sup> *Eine Erklärung der 12 Artikel des christlichen Glaubens*, ca. 1527

<sup>7</sup> *Peter Ridemans brief an die philippischen Brüder im land an der Ennß*, 1527

The bishop and his servants, the deacons, used to be their householders and stewards. They took care of both the spiritual and physical needs of the church. They distributed their possessions, which they held in common, to meet everyone's need. But after some time, they began to get greedy. They began to turn common goods into private property and to use them for personal gain.<sup>8</sup>

Sebastian Franck stated his own opinion as well:

To be fair, everything should be held in common...Private property, like the use of worldly force, began when the wicked Nimrod stepped out of God's order after the flood. Not only the Apostles testified against this evil, but Plato and Epicurus as well.<sup>9</sup>

It is no wonder that the first Anabaptists, reading such information and committed to following Jesus at all costs, found themselves on a collision course with the ungodly capitalism of their day. Soon after the first adult baptisms in southern Germany, Hans Romer directed a seeker, Ludwig Spon, to Sorga in Hesse: "There in a village near Hersfeld, called Sorga, there is a congregation that leads a good life. Everyone helps everyone else with goods and food when necessary. Forty or fifty people get together there."<sup>10</sup>

This particular group of Anabaptists at Sorga, after establishing relationships with Philip Plener in Auspitz, suffered a mass arrest. The authorities questioned the heads of the homes: "May a Christian own property?"

Answers received varied in detail but

they were consistent: "A Christian may have property but in such a way that he has it not, and no one should call property his own...Holders of property yet owning nothing, Christians use property only as long as it pleases God. Then, when a neighbor or when God needs it, they let it go... Christians may have property but they should remain gelassen (unattached)."<sup>11</sup>

Other Anabaptists captured at the Hessian village of Berka said: "Everything except husbands and wives should be held in common... Everyone who believes like us has just as much right to our belongings as we do, but those who don't share our faith do not."<sup>12</sup>

Heini Frei, captured and interrogated at Zollikon in Switzerland, said about the Anabaptists (after his recantation):

They believed that everything should be pooled as common property, and whatever someone needed, he should take from the common store.<sup>13</sup>

### Love that Cannot Help but Share

Community, for the Swiss and South German Anabaptists, was not a legalistic obligation. It did not come from obedience to apostolic example, nor was it a penance. They shared their things in a spontaneous, joyful way because true love, they said, had unfolded itself in their hearts.

Gabriel Ascherham, trained as a furrier in the old Bavarian city of Nürnberg, became the leader of a large Anabaptist community at Rossitz in Moravia, in the late 1520s. Coming from Silesia, Bavaria, and many parts

of Switzerland and Austria, around one thousand two hundred brothers and sisters lived there in voluntary community of goods. Gabriel wrote:

The apostles did not preach anything about community of goods nor order any one to keep it in the first church at Jerusalem. But when they heard the good news of Christ and the kingdom of God, the people believed and came to take part in the visible kingdom of the Holy Ghost. He filled them with joy and fixed their hearts upon heavenly blessings so that they counted earthly possessions as nothing. Willingly, on their own, and without being told, motivated only by the joy in their hearts, they went and sold their property, bringing the money from it to lay at the apostles' feet. Then they distributed to everyone according to his need. The first believers began community of goods without being told, everyone giving out of his own free will. Community of goods, as a result, was an open witness of the kingdom of God that had already come to them. It was not something commanded by men for the sake of the kingdom of God.<sup>14</sup>

Four hundred seventy years after the founding of the community at Rossitz, a nineteen-year-old Anabaptist—a boy who decided against becoming a Roman Catholic priest and who joined the movement in Central America—put the same belief to words:

I believe that to live in community only to benefit from the blessings of it is wrong. Unless God has first called us to spiritual community and has placed community of goods into our hearts, all other mo-

<sup>8</sup> *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Urkundliche Quellen zur hessischen Reformationsgeschichte, 4: Wiedertäuferakten 1527-1626*, ed. Günther Franz (Marburg: N. G. Elwert 1951)

<sup>11</sup> *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> Paul Wappler, *Die Stellung Kursachsens und des Landgrafen Philipp von Hessen zur Täuferbewegung* (Münster: Aschendorff 1910) 168-176

<sup>13</sup> *Quellen...*Zürich, 48

<sup>14</sup> From *Vom Unterschied Göttlicher und Menschlicher Weisheit*, first published in 1544.

tives or reasons for seeking community are wrong. Unless God has given us such a love that we cannot help but share our goods and our time with others, whatever we try is in vain.

I do believe that community should be optional, but why should it be optional? For one thing, we do not want to force anyone into something that he or she has not been called to. But at the same time, if a person receives the call from God to live in community, then community is no longer an optional thing, but the will of God for that person. Now, my question is: Have we been called into community? If we have, then are we going to let preferences, likes and dislikes, etc. keep us from it? I surely would not consider going into community with others if this sense of belonging together is not there between us and them. This sense of belonging together is what holds people together as they work out their differences. As long as we can feel that, we should not be afraid of going ahead with whatever the Lord puts before us.

An *Ausbund* writer wrote:

To be like Christ, we love one another through everything here on this earth. We love one another, not just with words, but in deeds...If we have of this world's goods (no matter how much or how little) and see that our brother has a need, but do not share with him what we have freely received—how can we say that we would be ready to give our lives for him if necessary?

The one who is not faithful in the smallest thing, and who still seeks his own good which his heart desires—how can he be trusted with a charge over heavenly things? Let us keep our eyes on love!<sup>15</sup>

## The Year of Release

The first Anabaptists found the promise of Christian community in the Old Testament year of release. Peter Walpot wrote:

For six years, the Israelites could harvest their crops, every man for himself, but the seventh year was a year of release. It was proclaimed that the land should hold a solemn Sabbath unto the Lord.

On this seventh year, the Israelites could not harvest their crops. Everything the land produced was to be held in common and enjoyed by everyone—by the father of the household and his servants, by the cattle, and by the wild animals of the land. Slaves were to be released with all manner of gifts and presents, and whoever had lent anything to his neighbor was to cancel the debt in the year of release. It was to be a glorious time, like a wedding feast, and it was a picture of the time of the new covenant in Christ.

The true year of release is the acceptable year of the Lord, as the prophet himself interprets it. It is the year when those who all their lives have been slaves of the devil are released. We celebrate it by having all the goods that God has given us in common through Christian love, and by enjoying them with our neighbors, brothers, and households, not claiming anything for our own. We now live in a much more glorious and festive year of release than that of the Old Testament. We live in the year of grace.<sup>16</sup>

## The Kingdom Community

The Kingdom of Heaven, the first Anabaptists believed, comes to earth

in the community of those who follow Jesus. Ambrutz Spittelmayr, before he was beheaded for his faith in 1527, wrote:

Nobody can inherit the kingdom unless he is poor with Christ, for a Christian has nothing of his own, no place where he can lay his head. A real Christian should not even have enough property on the face of the earth to stand on with one foot. This does not mean that he should lie down in the woods and not have a job, or that he should not have fields and pasture lands, or that he should not work. It simply means that he should not think that these things are for his own use and be tempted to say, "This house is mine. This field is mine. This dollar is mine." Rather he should say, "It is ours," even as we pray "Our Father."

A Christian should not have anything of his own but should have all things in common with his brother, not letting him suffer need. In other words, I will not work that my house be filled, that my pantry be supplied with meat, but rather I will see that my brother has enough, for a Christian looks more to his neighbor than to himself.<sup>17</sup>

Wolfgang Brandhuber wrote in 1529:

Watch out for false prophets who gather the money-hungry about them and resist the commands of Christ. They do not like to be told to live in the order of Christ. They become displeased upon discovering that every person in the church community cannot be his own treasurer (Secklmaister). They go around as hypocrites, contradicting the life of Christ and speaking against the order established by His beloved apostles. These false

<sup>15</sup> *Ausbund*, 119:12-14

<sup>16</sup> *Von der wahren Glassenheit und christlicher Gemeinschaft der Güeter*, 1547

<sup>17</sup> From Ambrutz's written testimony, October 25, 1527.

prophets say that it is not necessary to have all things in common. They say it is not necessary for every member to tell the others in love how much he has (or doesn't have). They do not want to have men made responsible by the community for everyone's money. Rather they want to keep their financial affairs to themselves and manage their own affairs. I call this wrong. Wherever God makes it possible for us to do so, we should have our things in common for His glory. If we share the most important things (our common faith in Christ), why should we not share that which is least important (our earthly goods)? I do not mean to say with this that we should carry everything together onto one pile. That would not even be proper in many situations. But the head of every home and everyone who has come to take part with him in the common faith should work together for the common fund (Seckl). This includes everyone: the married man, the young worker, the women, the girls, and whoever shares the faith. Even though every man earns his own wage (and Jesus said the laborer is worthy of his hire), love compels everyone to place his earnings into the common fund (den Seek!); yes, it is love that brings this about.<sup>18</sup>

Ulrich Stadler, servant of the Word at Austerlitz, who fled with a small group to Poland when the Kleinhäufner were scattered for a time in the 1530s wrote:

All gifts and goods that God gives to His own are to be held in common with all the children of God. For this we need sincere, resigned, and willing hearts in Christ. We need hearts who truly believe and

trust God and are completely surrendered in Christ.



Linz, in Austria, where believers gathered here and there, in one another's homes at night. Living in a hostile city, not all of them could work, eat, and fellowship openly together, all the time, but their sense of Gemeinschaft with Jesus, and with one another remained strong. As persecution increased, it grew even stronger.

People criticize us and say that the Lord never commanded us directly to have our goods in common and to appoint managers over the finances of the church community. But to live like this is to truly serve the saints. It is the outworking of love. In Christ we learn to lose ourselves in the service of the saints, to be and become poor if only others may be better off.

To hand over all lands and goods and to throw away our rights to private property takes true resignation (Gelassenheit) and a free giving of ourselves to the Lord and to His people...Each brother shall serve another. Each brother shall live and work but not just for himself.<sup>19</sup>

Berndt Rothmann, who wrote the main part of the Verantwortung published by Pilgram Marpeck and the south German Anabaptists, wrote:

We hope that the spirit of Gemeinschaft among us is so strong and

glorious that community of goods will be practiced with a pure heart through the grace of God as it has never been practiced before. Not only do we have our goods in common under the supervision of the servants of material needs, but we also praise God with one heart and one inspiration through Jesus Christ, and we are inclined to serve one another in every way. All that have served their own materialism and the owning of property, such as buying, selling, and working for personal gain, interest, or speculation, even with unbelievers, and drinking and eating the sweat of the poor through whose labor we fatten ourselves—all this has disappeared completely among us through the power of love and community.<sup>20</sup>

Peter Walpot wrote:

To profess to believe in one holy Christian church and in the community of the holy ones is a main article of the Christian faith. This is not a profession of partial but of complete community, both in spiritual and material goods and gifts. The one who professes to believe in the community of the holy ones, but who does not live in community of goods is a liar and not a true member of the Lord's church.

How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for them to get in. If Christ would not require a total surrender and community of goods from all those who want to go in to eternal life and inherit heavenly goods, it would not be hard for the rich. It would be as easy for the rich as it is for the poor to enter the kingdom of God.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> From *Eine liebe Unterrichtung der Sünden halben, auch des Ausschlusses...und der Gemeinschaft der Güter halben*, ca. 1530

<sup>20</sup> From *Eyne Restitution edder Eine wedderstellung rechter unde gesunder Christliker leergelovens unde levens...1534*  
<sup>21</sup> *Fünf Artikel...1547*

<sup>18</sup> *Sendbrief...1529*

Leupold Scharnschlager, servant of the brothers in Switzerland, wrote:

Some who profess the faith are neither hot nor cold. They say they have been baptized with the Holy Spirit and are members of the body of Christ. They are rich but do not know that they are miserable, blind, poor, and naked, and that the Lord will spit them out.

Some of these have gone back and allowed themselves to be taken up with the business and dealings (Geschäft und Handel) of this world again. They say they want to build up a business for the good of

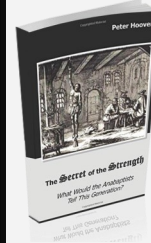
themselves and their children, but in doing so they fall back to loving the world from which they once turned away. By doing so they return to licking up what they have vomited out, and have given themselves over to foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition.

These who want to make money for themselves hinder and hold up the work of the Lord, and make it so that the knowledge of the truth does not grow. Instead of becoming rich in heavenly gifts and goods, they cause the church com-

munity to become drowsy and discouraged, weak in the faith and good works, and finally to go to sleep with the five foolish virgins.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> From *Gemeine Ordnung der Glieder Christi in sieben Artikeln gestellt*, ca. 1545

Continued in Next Issue



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## What is The Will of the Father?

—by Harold Sadlier

*“In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thes. 1:8-9)*

What does it mean to “obey not the Gospel?” Is it doing many wonderful things for Jesus, in the name of Jesus?

*“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” (Matthew 7:22-23).*

No, it is not doing anything for (Jesus).

*“Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (v 21).*

Is doing the will of the Father obeying the gospel? What is the will of the Father? Apparently, it's not doing all these wonderful things.

### A Point to Consider

To the saved:

- Are we to feed the hungry? Yes.
- Does God want me to clothe the naked? Yes.
- Does God want me to shelter the homeless? Yes.

But, if this is all I do without sharing and spreading the gospel, then all I am doing is making the world a better place to go to hell from.

Thrust into eternity, clothed.  
Thrust into eternity, fed.  
Thrust into eternity.....

So again, what is the will of the Father? What does it mean to obey the gospel?

Back to 2 Thessalonians 1, see verse 3:  
*“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.”*

Why does your charity abound? Because your faith grows exceedingly.

What is the will of the father?

*“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth*

*all men every where to repent” (Acts 17: 30-31).*

*“Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:31).*

*“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9)*

The will of the father is that none perish, that all would believe!

*“Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:29).*

### Conclusion

*“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8).*



## A Story of Faith and Doubt

It was a stormy night on the Sea of Galilee. The disciples were in a boat, struggling against the wind and the waves. They had left Jesus behind after He had fed a large crowd with five loaves and two fish.

Suddenly, they saw a figure walking on the water, coming towards them. They were terrified, thinking it was a ghost. But then they heard a familiar voice: "...Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid" (Matthew 14:27).

They recognized Jesus, and their fear turned to awe.

Peter, the most impulsive and daring of them, said to Him, "...Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water" (Matthew 14:29).

Jesus replied, "Come."

Peter did not hesitate. Then he stepped out of the boat, leaving the others behind. Next, he fixed his eyes on Jesus and felt a surge of faith and courage. However, as he walked on the water, defying the laws of nature, he noticed the wind and the waves around him. He realized how dangerous his situation

was. He began to doubt his ability and his Lord. He started to sink.

As he sank, he refocused on Jesus and cried out, "...Lord, save me!" (Mtt 14:30).

Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. He said to him, "...O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matthew 14:31).

He lifted him up and brought him back to the boat. As soon as they got in, the wind and the waves ceased. The disciples were amazed and worshiped Him, saying, "...Of a truth thou art the Son of God" (Matthew 14:33).

## The Meaning of Stepping Out of the Boat

Stepping out of the boat - means getting out of your comfort zone. It means doing something you've never done before, or something that seems impossible or risky. It could be sharing your

faith with someone, volunteering for a ministry, giving more generously, or making a big life change.

Stepping out of the boat - requires faith and obedience. It means listening to the voice of Jesus and responding with a 'Yes,' even if you don't fully understand or feel ready. It means trusting that He will be with you and empower you to do His will.

Stepping out of the boat - involves facing your fears and doubts. It means not letting the storms and waves of life distract you or discourage you from following Jesus. It means keeping your eyes on Him and relying on His grace and strength.

Stepping out of the boat - leads to growth and blessing. It means experiencing the power and presence of Jesus in a new way. It means seeing Him work miracles and wonders in your life and in the lives of others. It means worshiping Him and glorifying Him as the Son of God.

## A Poem Inspired by the Story

Step out of the boat  
And follow the Lord  
He's calling you to come  
And walk on the water.

Step out of the boat  
And trust in His word  
He's promising you more  
Than you can imagine.

Step out of the boat  
And face your fears  
He's holding your hand  
And catching your tears.

Step out of the boat  
And see His glory  
He's showing you wonders  
And writing your story.

# STEP OUT OF THE BOAT

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*Luke 16:19–31*

**Intro:** The passage before us this morning tells us about a place called hell. Now, I know that the very idea of hell is mocked and ridiculed by many people in our modern world. However, I still believe the Bible, and the Bible is clear in its teaching that there is a place called hell.

Even though the Bible has much to say about hell, the doctrine is still ridiculed by many. The idea of hell is usually attacked along three lines of thought.

1. **Rationalism:** The rationalist says, *“There is no God, therefore there can be no hell.”* Charles Darwin said, *“This (referring to hell) is a damnable doctrine.”* But I say, *“Let God be true and every man a liar!”*

2. **Ridicule:** Those who ridicule the doctrine of hell say, *“There may be a God, but it is silly to speculate about millions of disembodied spirits frying in a lake of fire somewhere.”* Or, *“This is the twenty-first century! Wake up!”* Robert Ingersoll, a famous atheist of the early part of the twentieth century said, *“The idea of hell was born of revenge and brutality on the one side, and cowardice on the other. I have no respect for any man who preaches it! I dislike the doctrine, I hate it, I despise it, I defy this doctrine!”* But I say, *“Let God be true and every man a liar!”*

3. **Religion:** The religionist says, *“There is a God, but He is a God of love, and therefore He would not or could not send anyone to hell.”* This is the position of all the cults and of the liberals.

**Christian Science:** *“Hell is an error of the mortal mind.”*

**Jehovah’s Witnesses:** *“The wicked will be annihilated.”*

**Mormonism:** *“All will eventually be saved and will not suffer eternal punishment.”*

**Seventh-Day Adventist:** *“God will someday blot out all sin and sinners and establish a clean universe once again. The lost will burn up like a broom sage field.”*

Again, I say, *“Let God be true and every man a liar!”*

Much of what we know of hell, we learn from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He was the greatest hellfire and brimstone preacher in the Bible. Of the 162 references to hell and eternal judgment in the New Testament, 70 were spoken by the Lord Jesus! Why did Jesus speak so much on this subject?

⇒ He believed in hell’s reality.

⇒ He warned man about hell because He did not want them to go there.

Of all the passages that deal with hell, the one before us this morning is the greatest of all. In this passage, Jesus literally rips the lid off hell and allows us to look into the things that are happening there. We are allowed a **Glimpse Into A Place Called Hell.**

Now, before I get into the message too deeply this morning, I just want to clarify one fact. This place we will consider this morning is not the Lake of Fire. The Lake of Fire is where the lost will go after the Great White Throne Judgment. The place we are considering this morning is where lost men go when they die. It is a temporary holding area for the sinner. When a person leaves this world without Jesus as his/her Savior, they go to this place, and they stay there until they are called out to face God in judgment, then they are cast into the Lake of Fire. This

place is called Hades; the other is called Gehenna. Both are horrible beyond words.

Now, in this passage, we are confronted with two main people. The story of these men is a story of contrasts.

1. **There is a Contrast in the Men Themselves.** One rich and the other poor
2. **There is a Contrast in the Manner of their Deaths.** One died and was buried, and the other was greeted by the angels of the Lord and escorted to Paradise.
3. **There is a Contrast in their Destinations.** One in hell and the other in paradise. (Ill. Again, paradise was a temporary place where believers went before the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, **Luke 23:43.** However, no one is in paradise today, **Eph. 4:8–10.**)

This morning, I would like to focus on the rich man and what happened to him after he died. I would like for us to join him in hell this morning and learn the lessons that this passage of scripture teaches. If you are saved, may you be moved to a burden for the lost who are headed to this awful place. If you are lost, may you see your need to come to Jesus for salvation this morning. God help each of us to do what we need to do today! Let’s join the rich man in hell this morning for a **Glimpse Into A Place Called Hell.**

## I. Hell: A Place of Sensation (v. 23–25)

A. Notice that in hell, the rich man can see, he can hear, he can speak, he can feel, he still has desires, he still has needs, and he still has the ability to think and express himself.

B. Even though his body is in the grave in which it was buried, this man has



some sort of body that allows him to continue to live in this place called hell.

C. My friends, never let anyone mislead you at this point. If you die with your faith in Jesus, or if you die lost, you will not spend even one second in the grave. You will, at the very instant of your death, go either to heaven to be with the Lord Jesus, **2 Cor. 5:8**, or you will go immediately into hell if you die lost, **Luke 16:22–23**.

D. Never believe for an instant that death is the end or that man is no different than a dog, which dies and is no more. Man was given an immortal soul, and that soul will live on forever, whether in heaven or in hell. And, after death, that soul will be clothed in some sort of a body that can indeed experience the sensations that were so much a part of life.

E. Hell is a place of sensation! It is real, and it will be experienced by all those who go there!

## II. Hell: A Place of Separation (v. 26)

A. Notice that the rich man found himself separated from Lazarus and Abraham by a great gulf. The Bible says that this gulf is “*fixed*.” That is, it will never be taken away. This separation is eternal! This rich man found himself separated from everything that Lazarus enjoyed.

B. No doubt, one of the greatest torments of hell will be the separation from all the joys and wonderful things that life itself has to offer. For instance, there will never be a sunrise or sunset in hell. There will never be heard the laughter of a child, the gentle blowing of a summer breeze, the fragrance or beauty of flowers. There will be no one to tell you they love you. There will be none of the little things that make life worth living. Hell will be devoid of the good things of life. No family, no

friends, no fellowship. Nothing but endless isolation and eternal separation.

C. In hell, the lost sinners will never hear another sermon or another Gospel song, nor will anyone ever witness to them again. They will never be handed a tract. They will never be able to see or read a Bible. There will be no churches in hell. None of the things that point the lost to Jesus will make their appearance in that place called hell.

D. But, of all the things the sinner will not see in hell, the worst will be eternal separation from the presence of God, **2 Thes. 1:8–9**. Imagine being in a place where there was no mercy, no grace, no love, or the presence of God. Nothing but an endless hell and an endless separation from the One who loved you more than any other.

## III. Hell: A Place of Suffering (v. 24–25)

A. This passage makes very clear the fact that hell is a place of intense suffering. **Verses 24–25, 28** paint a vivid picture of what hell is like. The word “*torment*” is literally the word “*torture*”. The rich man is in a place of extreme pain and torture. The verb “*tormented*” in **verse 24** is in the “*present*” tense. This reminds us that the torments of hell do not cease. Man does not simply burn up as some of the cults teach, but he endures the pain and torment of hell eternally.

B. If this were the only place the Bible speaks of hell as a place of suffering, we might be able to write this off as a mere story. However, the Bible tells us in many different places that hell is a place of torment and suffering. Notice a few of those places.

1. **Unquenchable Fire—Mark 9:43; Luke 16:24**
2. **Memory and Remorse—Luke 16:25, 27–28**
3. **Unquenched Thirst—Luke 16:24–25**

4. **Misery and Pain—Luke 16:24–26; Rev. 14:10–11**

5. **Frustration and Anger—Luke 13:28; Matt. 24:51**

6. **Eternal Separation—Rev. 21:8**

7. **Undiluted Wrath**—In hell, the wrath of God will be given full vent!

C. Of all the agonies of hell, perhaps the worst one of all is depicted by the word “*remember*” v. **25**. This word tells us that men in hell have the capacity to remember the events of this life and that they are forced to deal with those memories eternally. They will remember every sermon they heard and rejected. They will remember when the Lord convicted their hearts and they turned a deaf ear to the pleas of the Holy Spirit. They will remember how God manifested Himself in thousands of ways to draw them unto Himself. They will remember, and they will know that they have no one to blame for their situation but themselves!

What will you remember when you get to hell, my lost friend? Will you remember this service? Will you remember all the saints of God who witnessed to you and prayed for you? Will you remember how you wasted your life on foolish things and condemned your own soul to hell’s fire? Will you remember how good God was to you and how you spurned His great love?

## IV. Hell: A Place of Stubbornness (v. 24–31)

A. This rich man is in hell. He finds himself in a place of flames and of divine punishment. However, he is not changed in the least. This is seen in several ways in this passage.

1. In **verse 24**, he still thinks himself superior and would see Lazarus sent into hell so that his needs might be met. He is still selfish and self-centered!
2. **Verses 26–31** tell us that now this man has a burden for the lost, but he

cares for none but those in his family. He is selfish!

3. **Verses 29–31** tell us that even in hell, he still hasn't figured out what it takes to keep a man from that awful place. He stubbornly begs for the salvation of his family and won't hear the truth that they must turn to God.

The whole point is that even in hell, he is totally unchanged. His old nature is still as self-centered as it ever was. There is no change!

B. These verses tell us that even when men find themselves in hell, they are still wretched, they are still lost, and they still have no room for God in their lives.

Some people believe that there will be a second chance after death. They believe that men will repent in the flames of hell, and when they have paid for their sins, they will be released and taken to heaven. However, this passage does not

show the rich man even uttering so much as one syllable in repentance! He never begs for mercy! He never cries out for salvation! He shows no change of heart or mind whatsoever. The point? Men in hell are as lost as they are now! They do not change, and they do not get a second chance at salvation. When their lives here end, their last chance has forever passed them by!

C. Friend, do not let that happen to you! If you have never been saved by the grace of God, you need to make that step today. Do not hold onto the foolish idea that there will be hope after death! Nothing could be farther from the truth. If you die without Jesus, there is nothing waiting on you but the flames of hell!

**Conc:** A recent ABC News poll revealed that 70% of Americans surveyed believed in a place called heaven. However, only 56% believed in a place called hell. People don't like to

think about the reality of that awful place of torment, punishment, and separation. But just because they don't believe in it does not change its reality! Hell is real! Hell is eternal, and hell is bad!

The good news this morning is that no person in this room has to go to hell! Jesus Christ died on the cross, shed His blood, and rose from the dead to pay for your sins. If you place your faith in Him, you will be saved, and you will go to heaven, not hell, when you leave this world.

In fact, hell wasn't even created for you, **Matt. 25:41**. Therefore, if you choose to go to hell instead of coming to Jesus, you choose to go to a place where you are not even wanted. You will go to hell as an uninvited intruder. My friend, I beg you, please don't be like this rich man. Come to Jesus and be saved!

**END**

## History of the Amish, Part 10

—by Magda Adriana

The previous article showed how the Amish church split gradually during the second half of the 19th century. The progressive-minded Amish took on the name “Amish Mennonites,” and during the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, they moved more toward the Mennonites. Eventually, all Amish Mennonite churches dropped the name “Amish” or merged with neighboring Mennonite churches.

### Close Connections Among the Old Order Amish

(Despite Geographical Distances)

We will focus on the group called “Old Order Amish” since they put much value on the Ordnung as the guideline for unity in the local congregation. The Old Order Amish continued to be a church where the local congregation had the final say in matters. Ordnungs differed slightly from church to church, but a

great sense of unity was noticeable among the Old Order churches. *The Budget*, a local newspaper in Sugar Creek, Ohio, also stimulated this unity. During its first years, it was mainly an Amish Mennonite newspaper owned by an Amish Mennonite family. However, about one-third of its readers were Old Order Amish and news from the scattered settlements came in through the readers' letters. Because the Amish Mennonites became increasingly closer with the Mennonites and started subscribing to the Mennonite newspapers, the *Budget* became more of an Old Order Amish newspaper. Also, the Amish Mennonite family who owned the business sold it to a Lutheran man with strong ties to the local Old Order Amish, contributing to the shift. Since 1946, there has been a local version with news from Sugar Creek and a national version that contains only the

scribes' reports and thus became the Old Order Amish newspaper (although in 1975, there came a similar newspaper, *Die Botschaft* in Pennsylvania – Some scribes write for both papers).

### New Split-Offs

Although there was a great sense of unity, this was not the case in all communities. Drifting and split-offs occurred both on the more progressive side as well as on the conservative side. For example, the Old Order Amish in Johnson County, Iowa, decided to have meeting houses instead of gathering in homes for Sunday worship services. They explicitly stated that this did not mean they intended to shift towards the Amish Mennonites. Nevertheless, within a few decades, that is exactly what they did: joined the Amish Mennonites. During the same period, the Old Order Amish in Somerset County, Pennsylva-

nia, built meeting houses. However, they remained Old Order.

Some Amish felt that even the Old Orders were not strict enough in their Ordnungs or in implementing them. Those Amish decided to form new groups: the Nebraska Amish (1881) in Mifflin County, PA (named after the Nebraska bishop who helped organize their fellowship) and the Swartzentruber Amish (1913) in Apple Creek, OH (named after a later influential bishop). The Nebraska Amish are also called “Weiss-Wegli-Leit”

because of their remarkable white-topped buggies.

There were also splits because some people felt the Old Order Amish were too strict. Under the guidance of Bishop Peachey, a breakaway group in Pennsylvania did away with strict shunning and accepted in-home telephones and

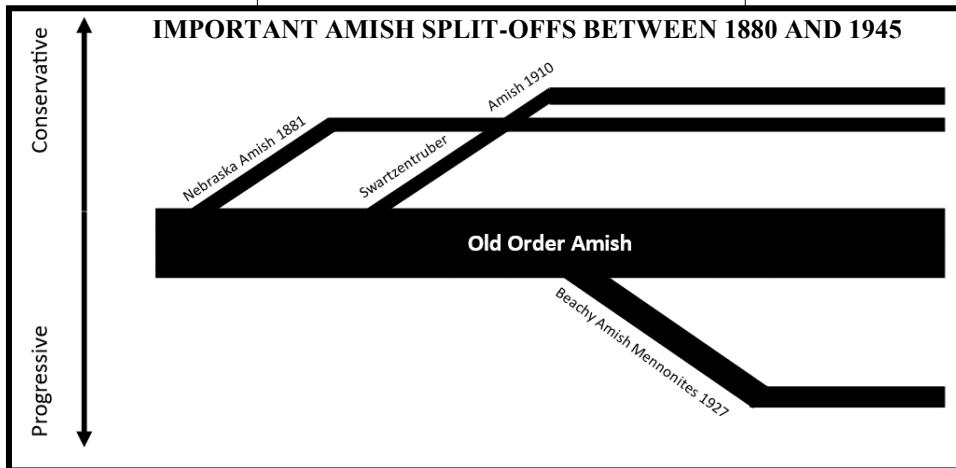
electricity. This group was nicknamed the “Peachey Church.” They allowed car use and ownership once cars became available for the common people. Before 1910, Old Order Amish had not arrived at a complete consensus on the use and abuse of new gadgetry, but the eager embrace of change by the Peachey faction helped incorporate

In 1927, a similar split occurred in Somerset County, Pennsylvania. Strict shunning was also the main reason for this split. In this case, the group that would remain Old Order split away from the main congregation. The larger, more lenient group was under the leadership of Bishop Beachy, and therefore got the name “Beachy Amish.” Soon,

this group was affiliated with the Peachey group. Because of the acceptance of modern technology, which is not typically Amish, the group was also called “Beachy Amish Mennonites.” This group is not seen as Amish

by many other Amish, and most of today’s members would rather identify as Mennonites. However, their plain-colored dress style still traces them back to their Amish roots.

*Primary source: “A History of the Amish” by Steven M. Nolt*



technological cautions and prohibitions more decidedly within the Old Order Church’s Ordnung. Thus, the withdrawal of a minority group of Lancaster progressives helped to unite the majority along more conservative lines. Although the Peachey group easily accepted technological progress, they did keep the simple Amish dress style.

Continued in Next Issue

## Blessed are the Poor in Spirit

—by John Weaver

What does it mean to be poor in spirit? Matthew 5:3 has been used to persuade a person that they cannot know they are saved and still be poor in spirit. The German the Amish use says, “geistlich aum,” or spiritually poor. Tragically, it is interpreted as spiritually ignorant.

Poor in spirit can only happen to the person who sees himself as not only poor but bankrupt with nothing whatsoever to pay the great debt he owes. It is knowing that all the works he could ever do, or all the rules he could ever keep, will not save him.

We are poor in spirit when:

- We understand, “For all have sinned

*and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).*

- We are under conviction. “*O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*” (Romans 7:24).
- When we can say like the miserable man, “I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord...” (Romans 7:25).
- When we realize that the great debt we owed but had no possibility of paying was already paid!
- When we see that we can do nothing spiritually to earn salvation.
- That we are saved by grace, through faith and that is a gift from God

(Ephesians 2:8).

Then, and only then, are we poor in spirit. We are poor, but He is rich.

The words “poor in spirit” refer to our efforts. In a spiritual sense, we are poor. To say that we are proud if we say we know our sins are forgiven could not be farther from the truth.

Lord, this morning I come to you, not proud, but eternally grateful. Thank you for opening my eyes, to the real state that I was in: poor, wretched, miserable and more. But when I realized that Jesus paid it all, I was and am overwhelmed. All I can say is, thank you, thank you Lord. Amen.

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## November

### **Biblical Counseling: The Cure to Depression** (part 4 of 4)

Pastor John Marino explores secular counseling vs. biblical counseling.

### **When We Feel Helpless** (Parts 1 and 2)

When you're facing insurmountable obstacles and all appears to be lost, there is only one direction to turn: toward God. Dr. Charles Stanley exhorts us to lean on God and trust Him to intervene in our most difficult trials. It's when you're at the end of your rope that you learn to truly rely on God.

### **Going Digital or You Cannot Buy or Sell**

Jan Markell spends the hour with Alex Newman. They present the idea that a one-world government could be mandated over health issues. Digital health passports will make this possible and they are on the scene now. This is leaping out of the Bible. Antichrist's system is on the horizon.

### **13 Scholars Answer Tough Questions About the Rapture, Tribulation, and the 2nd Coming** (part 7 out of 7)

## December

### **The Grace of God: Our Salvation**

Dr. Charles Stanley discusses the depths and reach of God's grace as it relates to our salvation. When our eyes are opened to the sinfulness in our lives, it becomes even harder to explain how God, in all of His righteousness and holiness, could reach down and save us.

### **The Holy Spirit**

Dr. Charles Stanley delves into our relationship and interactions with the third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. His active presence is essential if we are to carry out the work God has called us to do.

### **It's Almost Over: The Times of the Gentiles**

Jan Markell, Trevor Rubenstein, and Olivier Melnick. The Times of the Gentiles are winding down, but what does that mean? Why are most churches silent on the Hebrew Roots Movement and Dual Covenant Theology?

### **O Death, Where is Your Sting?**

Jan Markell and Dr. Ron Rhodes consider the glories of heaven where the former things will not be remembered. We will have transformed bodies. What will our roles be? What about infants and children?

## January

### **Is There a God?**

Is there evidence outside of the Bible that helps us answer the question of the existence of God? Has science disproven God? Message by Ed Stetzer.

### **Made Whole by God**

Man was created in the image of God, with three distinct parts making up the whole: Body, Soul and Spirit. Sin destroyed our Spirit and took control of our Soul and Body, but Jesus came that we would be Made Whole. Message by Duane Sheriff.

### **A Goose, a Swan, and a Reformation**

The most important question you can ask: Is certainty of salvation possible? In this sermon, Dr. Erwin Lutzer shares the great lessons from the heroes of the Reformation that continue to encourage us as believers today.

### **In the Hands of a Rapist**

Kidnapped from a Kmart parking lot, Margy Mayfield spent the next 10 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!

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

When you read the Bible, do you believe what it says? Have you ever read something in the Bible that is contrary to what you believe?

How do you respond to something in the Bible that is contrary to what you believe or were taught? Do you change your mind to believe what God says, or do you ignore it?

Do you say that you believe in God yet refuse to believe His words? Would you rather follow someone's opinion?

When you hear a sermon, do you search the scriptures to see whether things are so?

Let's see what Gods Word says about this topic:

*"The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times"* (Psalms 12:6).

*"Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever"* (Pslams 12:7).

*"The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever"* (Isaiah 40:8).

As you can see, the Bible says that the words of the Lord are pure words, purified seven times. No other book can claim that.

The Bible also says that the words of our God will stand forever. Don't you think God will use those words to judge us? According to 2 Timothy, He will.

2 Timothy 3:16 says, *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for REPROOF, for CORRECTION, for instruction in righteousness:"*

This verse means exactly what it says. When someone has a question, do you research to see what the Bible says about it, or do you just give your opin-

ion? Do you know the scriptures enough to give a Biblical answer?

*"Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God"* (Matthew 22:29).

*"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth"* (John 17:17).

*"God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar..."* (Romans 3:4).

*"Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm..."* (Jeremiah 17:5).

*"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death"* (Proverbs 14:12).

As you can see, it's very important to go to the Bible for our answers.

If you ever have a question and you ask another person about it, you should ask yourself the following question, "Do they get the Bible to see what it says, or do they just give you their opinion?"

Let's be very careful to make sure we believe and follow God's Word instead of someone's opinion.

*"Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him"* (Proverbs 30:5).

*"Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar"* (Proverbs 30:6).

*"Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you"* (Proverbs 1:23).

We saw above that 2 Timothy 3:16 also talks about

reproof/correction. Aren't those beautiful words?

On the flip side, the Bible also says the following about those that disregard God's reproof and counsel:

*"But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof"* (Proverbs 1:25).

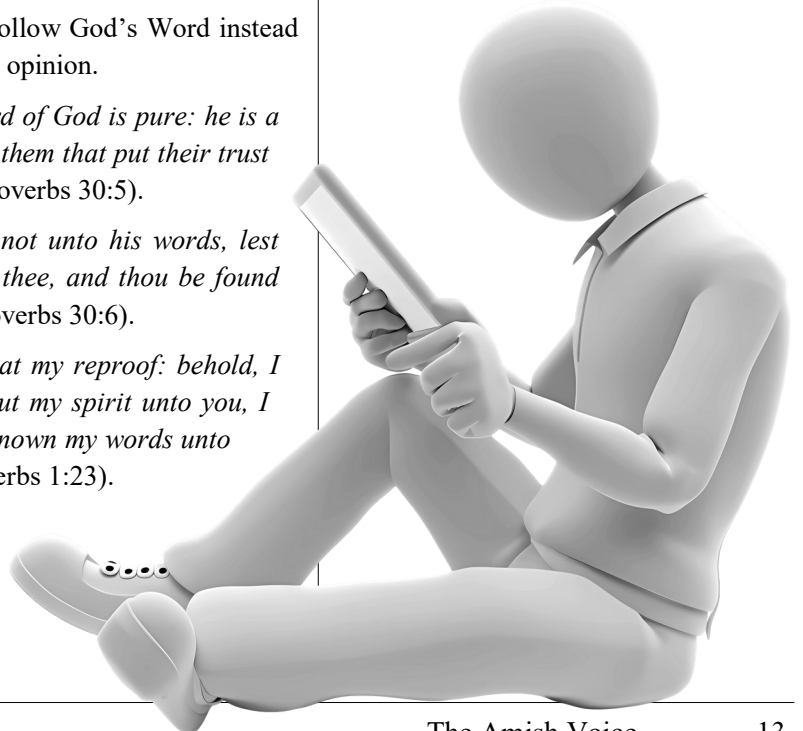
*"They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof"* (Proverbs 1:30).

*"Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way and be filled with their own devices"* (Proverbs 1:31).

Which one would you like? The choice is yours.

Is the Bible your final authority? Let's all be more like the Bereans in Acts 17:11:

***"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."***



# Nonconformity—When Does Transformation Happen?

—by Simon Fry—[simonjry.wordpress.com/2018/02/](http://simonjry.wordpress.com/2018/02/)

“Why do you dress like that?” “Why are your clothes so different than those around you?” “Why do you all dress alike?”

Most of us who were raised in conservative Anabaptist/Mennonite homes have probably been asked at least one, or maybe all, of these questions at some point in our lives. People don’t always give the same answers, but here are some of the answers that I have heard given through the years:

- ⇒ This is how my church asks me to dress.
- ⇒ We don’t want to be worldly, so we don’t dress like the world.
- ⇒ We believe in nonconformity to the world.
- ⇒ We want to have unity in our church.
- ⇒ We believe in dressing modestly.

These are all short, easy answers that most of us have been taught. Yet, in some ways, they are such insufficient, unsatisfactory answers. I wonder if we would have better answers if we were pressed. What if we were then asked questions such as:

- ⇒ Would you still dress that way if your church did not have that rule?
- ⇒ Do you believe that anyone who does not dress like you is of the world—even those of other churches?
- ⇒ Does dressing differently keep you from being conformed to the world?
- ⇒ Since you all dress alike, do you now all have unity of the Spirit?
- ⇒ Do you consider all those who are dressed differently than you to be immodest?

## Romans 12:2 and Nonconformity

When a sermon is preached with Ro-

mans 12:2 as the main script in a typical Anabaptist church, we already have a general idea of what we will hear. Nonconformity is very important to our people and has been focused on for many generations for well over a hundred years. We’ve been taught how important it is to look different from the world.

We tend to look at other denominations with a bit of condescension. We feel we are at a little higher level on the holiness ladder. After all, they seem to just ignore this verse.

What if other denominations aren’t ignoring this verse but are looking at it from a different angle than we do?

What is the most important part of this verse? Is it to avoid being conformed to the world, or is it to be transformed by the renewing of our minds? We know both are important, and both must happen in the life of a born-again Christian.

Maybe another question to ask would be, do either of these directives depend on the other? In other words, must you be “nonconformed to the world” before you can be “transformed by the renewal of your mind?” Or do we need to be “transformed” before we can be “nonconformed to the world?” Which should happen first?

Though we might not hear it emphasized, transformation must happen first, or nonconformity is worthless.

Have you ever tried to make a caterpillar act like a butterfly? No matter what you do, it will naturally crawl on its belly and eat leaves. You can attempt to put it on a flower, but it will not drink nectar. Its nature has not changed. When a caterpillar is transformed into a butterfly, who tells that butterfly to act like a butterfly rather than a caterpillar?

Must they be told constantly to stop crawling and to do what butterflies are supposed to do?

A caterpillar has within itself everything needed to become a butterfly. And yet, it will not do anything a butterfly does until it transforms. During the cocoon stage, everything that is caterpillar literally dies and becomes a soupy ooze that is used as fuel for the rapid cell division that takes place to make a butterfly. After that, its very nature changes.

There are some ways this analogy does not work, but it makes a point. It is not worth our time to try to force someone who has not been born again to act like a saved person. Their nature has not changed. We can not make them want to do what has not been instilled in them yet.

After salvation—or transformation—our minds are renewed, and we think differently.

Are we Anabaptists focusing too much on not conforming to the world? Instead of conforming to the world, we are to be transformed by the “renewing of our minds”. What if our focus would be on that first? Would we see the other happening more naturally?

In Ephesians 4:22-32, we see the concept of putting off and putting on. Put off lying, put on speaking truth; put off stealing, put on laboring and giving; put off corrupt communication, put on edifying communication.

Instead of trying not to lie, we need to speak truth. Instead of reminding ourselves not to steal, we must work to provide for our needs and others. Instead of trying our hardest not to let bitterness, wrath, and anger spew out of us onto others, we need to be kind and tenderhearted to others.



If there is no difference between us and the world, perhaps it's because no transformation has occurred. We should be different. Our minds, our very motivations for every choice we make, should be different than an unsaved person. What we feed our minds on should look different than it used to. There should be a hunger and thirst for righteousness that was not there before.

We should not have to make rules to try to keep our people from being "conformed to the world." Should born-again Christians look differently from the world? Possibly. But if the only reason they do is because the church rules are there, that is not transformation. It is more like strapping wings on a caterpillar and calling it a butterfly.

Did the disciples look different than those around them? There is nothing in Scripture to prove that they did. But I doubt that the world around them looked like the world does today. Paul warns believers in both 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 3 to dress modestly and to focus on adorning the inward man more than the outward. We should want to put on ornaments of a meek and quiet spirit more than outward ornaments. We should want to dress simply and modestly.

But we should want to do this because of a transformation that happened within, and we want to do what God wants, not because my church has a list of dress rules I must follow to look different from the world.

Just looking different than the world does not mean that I am not conformed



to the world any more than strapping wings on the back of a caterpillar means that it is no longer a caterpillar. It's not about looking different from the world; it's about not being conformed to—or patterned after—the world. The way to keep from being conformed is by a transformation—a metamorphosis—in our minds.

If our hearts/minds have not undergone any transformation, looking differently will do us no good.

Jeremiah 17:9 speaks of the heart (mind, will, feelings) being "deceitful" and "desperately wicked." It has been

said that this is why we need rules. We are fearful that our hearts will betray us if we don't set extra guidelines. However, is this verse speaking of a heart that has been transformed, or is it speaking of an unregenerate heart?

Can God transform our hearts and give us clean hearts that aren't "desperately wicked?" If He cannot transform our hearts/minds, then what is the point of Rom. 12:2?

When David sinned with Bathsheba, we see him crying out to God in Psalm 51, confessing his sin, and asking God to blot out his iniquities. Then, in verse 10, David says, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

When God created the world and everything in it, He made something out of nothing and said it was good. When God creates a clean heart, He makes it good. When our heart is transformed, our desires and our thought patterns are no longer wicked and deceitful. That doesn't mean we are perfect, but what we hunger after is changed.

If there is something in me that wants to conform to—or pattern after—everything the world does, if my desires are not different from the world, perhaps I need to do like David and ask God to create a clean heart in me. Perhaps my mind/heart has not gone through the transformation of metamorphosis into renewal.

## God is BIG

—by Gerald Hochstetler

God is big. Very BIG! In fact, He is so big that the earth is His footstool.

*"Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon him as long as I live" (Ps 116:2).*

As the Bible says, He bends over or inclines His ear and pays close attention. At slightest sound of a prayer motivated by faith, God springs to action.

I don't know what goes on in heaven, but maybe He calls the angels, "Come quickly. There is faith. There is prayer on earth," as they hover over those who pray to prepare action that would be in the eternal best interest of those who pray.

Notice that He prepares to move according to what is best for you in light

of eternity. That may not be exactly what you prayed for. But because He is big, old, and eternal, He is much smarter than you. He wants you to make it home more than you want to go home. Thus, He does what is best for His praying ones.

When that becomes a reality, it takes care of many questions.

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## My Grace is Sufficient

—by Joe Keim

According to Scripture, the Lord revealed some of His most precious mysteries to the apostle Paul by allowing him to see visions and revelations. At one point, Paul was caught up to the third heaven, paradise. While there, he heard things so stunning, so staggering, so far out that they could not be uttered in the physical realm.

Amidst his extraordinary experiences, Paul was given a 'thorn in the flesh.' After praying three times for its removal, Paul understood that this thorn was not a burden but a blessing. It prevented him from boasting and kept him humble, serving as a reminder of his dependence on God.

What was the thorn in Paul's flesh?

Some say blindness or a specific type of sickness. Both of these and most other speculations are wrong. The Bible says clearly that the thorn was a messenger from Satan to buffet (torment) Paul.

All of us might ask: If Paul was such a profound and influential player in God's army, why would God stop short of delivering him from the messenger of Satan and continual torment?

Paul, most likely, felt handicapped, frustrated, and discouraged. Lord, why? Just deliver me! It's hindering

me from being all I could be. It's hindering me from the ones I am trying to minister to. Oh please, Lord, take it away.

What if the frustrations in your and my ministry are also related to the messenger of Satan? What if those frustrations are a means of God to keep us from glorying in ourselves? What if those frustrations are a means of God to keep others from elevating us to heights undeserved?

In our devotions, Esther and I concluded that if the continual battles and torment keep us humble, then we are good with it. In fact, we could not describe how grateful we both felt in our hearts.

After Paul finished asking God to remove the thorn, Jesus responded:

*"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in [your] weakness."*

In response to Jesus' words, Paul declared:

*"Therefore, I would rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."*

This idea of a thorn in the flesh is not new. It is an OT tactic God used for the same purpose as He did in Paul's ministry. It is also undoubtedly a tactic God uses in our day and our ministries.



And *lest I should be exalted above measure* through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, *My grace is sufficient* for thee; for *My strength is made perfect* in weakness.

*Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

*Therefore I take pleasure* in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

The author invites you to text or call if you have questions or comments!  
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