

MY VOWS TO THE AMISH CHURCH: *Are They Binding?*

1. The Question That Haunted Me

As a young Amish boy, I understood that when I reached a certain age, I would be expected to join the church. Joining the church meant more than being baptized. I would publicly confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, promise loyalty to the Amish church, and agree to obey its rules and Ordnung.



Like many other young people my age, I went through this process without clearly understanding salvation. I knew the words I was expected to say, and I understood the importance of submitting to the church. However, I did not understand what it meant to be born again, to be justified by faith, or to have full assurance that my sins were forgiven.

As I grew older, I realized that what I had been taught did not satisfy the deep spiritual need in my heart. I wanted to know where I stood with God. I wanted to know what salvation was, how it was received, and whether a person could know for certain that he had eternal life.

The thought of dying terrified me. I tried to live as a good Amish youth, but I still had no peace. I had joined the church, submitted to baptism, and made my vows, yet I did not know whether I was saved.

Eventually, a strong sense that I did not belong led me to leave the Amish. But after leaving, one question continued to trouble me:

What about the vows I made to the church?

As a young teenage boy, I had promised, on bended knee, to help build the church and obey its rules and regulations. Had I placed myself under condemnation by breaking those promises? Had I turned my back on God by leaving the Amish church?

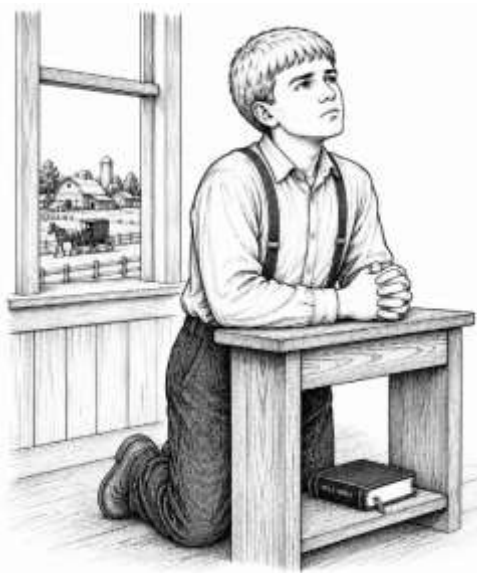
The bishop and ministers certainly wanted me to think so. Yet another question continued to press upon my heart. If the church could not show me from Scripture how to have assurance of salvation, did it truly have the authority to assure me of condemnation?

These questions could not be answered by tradition, fear, or the opinions of men. I needed to know what God said in His Word.

2. The Vows I Made as an Amish Youth

Most young Amish people do not grow up asking whether they will join the church. They grow up assuming that they will. Joining is presented as the expected path for every young person who wants to remain part of the family and community.

The pressure may not always be spoken openly. Sometimes it is communicated through disappointed looks, warnings, family expectations, and fear of what will happen if one chooses another path. A young person



understands that refusing baptism and church membership may affect family relationships, friendships, employment, and acceptance within the community.

Because of this, it is fair to ask how voluntary these vows truly are.

A vow is a serious promise. Scripture warns against making vows carelessly. Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 says:

“When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.”

These verses show that vows should never be treated lightly. However, notice that the passage speaks of a vow made **unto God**.

It does not teach that a church may require young people to make lifelong promises to an organization as a condition of baptism, acceptance, or salvation.

Vows in Scripture were to be made voluntarily and sincerely. They were not to be produced through fear, social pressure, or a lack of understanding.

Many Amish young people make church vows before they have enough knowledge of Scripture to examine what they are promising. They are often taught the Ordnung, but they may not understand the gospel of grace.

They know what the church expects, but they may not know what Christ has already accomplished on the cross.

Later, if they begin studying the Bible and discover that some church teachings are not supported by Scripture, they feel trapped. They have been taught that leaving the church means breaking their vows, rejecting God, trampling on the blood of Christ, and placing themselves under eternal condemnation.

This creates a painful situation. The person feels that he must choose between obeying the church and following what he now understands from the Word of God.

But no church has the authority to require a vow that prevents a person from obeying God. A promise made to men cannot place their authority above the authority of Jesus Christ.

3. Can a Church Vow Save or Condemn?

Does the Bible teach that a person must make a vow to a church, bishop, minister, or religious system in order to be born again?

The answer is no.

The New Testament never teaches that salvation is received through church membership vows. It never says that a person must promise lifelong obedience to a church organization before Christ will save him.

Salvation rests upon the promise of God, not upon promises we make to men.



John 1:12 says:

“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.”

A person becomes a child of God by receiving Christ and believing on His name. He is not born into God’s family through membership in a particular denomination, culture, or community.

Jesus said:

“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

Jesus did not say, “The church is the way.” He did not say, “The Ordnung is the way.” He did not say, “Your vows are the way.” He said, *“I am the way.”*

No church can save a person, and no church has the final authority to condemn a person to hell. God alone holds that authority. Psalm 62:11 says:

“God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God.”

A church may preach the gospel, teach Scripture, baptize believers, provide fellowship, and practice discipline according to the Word of God. These are important responsibilities. However, a church must never take the place of Christ.

If a church cannot give eternal life, it cannot take eternal life away. If it cannot wash away sin, it cannot place forgiven sin back upon a believer.

Romans 8:33-34 asks:

“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again.”

God is the One who justifies. Christ is the One who died and rose again. The final word concerning our standing before God does not belong to a bishop, minister, parent, or church. It belongs to God.

4. Salvation Comes Through Christ Alone

For years, I tried to place part of my trust in Jesus and part of my trust in living a good Amish life. I did not understand that salvation cannot be divided between the work of Christ and the works of man.

The need for obedience was drilled into us from an early age. We heard much about submitting to parents,



ministers, bishops, and the Ordnung. Yet the finished work of Jesus Christ was not explained clearly enough for me to understand how a sinner could be made right with God.

Scripture teaches that salvation is received by grace through faith.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says:

“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.”

Salvation is not a reward for good behavior. It is not earned by dressing in a certain way, using a horse

and buggy, avoiding electricity, obeying church traditions, or keeping a list of rules. Salvation is the gift of God.

Romans 10:9, 10, and 13 says:

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

And:

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Notice the word **whosoever**. This promise is not limited to one culture, nationality, or church group. The same Lord is rich unto all who call upon Him.

The apostles preached repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. They called people to believe the gospel, receive Christ, and be baptized as believers. They did not require people to make lifelong vows to a religious organization before they could be saved.

The foundation of the gospel is not what we promise to do for Christ. It is what Christ has already done for us.

First Corinthians 15:3-4 gives the heart of the gospel:

“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.”

Jesus carried our sins to the cross. He died in our place, was buried, and rose again. The sinner who comes to Him in repentance and faith is forgiven, justified, and made a child of God.

Nothing needs to be added to His finished work.

5. Did the Apostles Require Church Vows?

When we examine the book of Acts, we find many people receiving Christ and being baptized. Yet we do not find the apostles requiring them to vow obedience to a church organization.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached Christ to the people. Acts 2:37-38 says:



“Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ.”

Peter did not tell them to promise obedience to a man-made Ordnung. He called them to repent and identify themselves with Jesus Christ.

When Philip preached to the Ethiopian eunuch, the man asked to be baptized. Philip answered:

“If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest” (Acts 8:37).

The requirement was faith in Christ.

When the Philippian jailer asked, “Sirs, *what must I do to be saved?*” Paul and Silas answered:

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:30-31).

They did not say, “Join our group and vow to obey our traditions.” They directed him to Christ.

Baptism is an important act of obedience. It is the believer’s public identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. However, baptism does not give a church ownership over the person being baptized.

Every believer belongs first and foremost to Jesus Christ.

First Corinthians 6:19-20 says:

“Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price.”

We are bought with the precious blood of Christ. We do not belong to a bishop, denomination, culture, or religious tradition. We belong to the Lord who purchased us.

A local church should help believers follow Christ. It should never demand the kind of loyalty that belongs only to Christ.

6. The Purpose of the Law and the Amish Ordnung

The law of Moses came directly from God. Yet even that law could not save anyone.

Galatians 3:24-26 says:

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”

The law revealed sin. It showed mankind the holiness of God and the guilt of the human heart. It pointed people toward their need for a Savior.

Romans 3:20 says:

“For by the law is the knowledge of sin.”

The law could expose sin, but it could not remove sin. It could pronounce guilt, but it could not give eternal life. Only Christ can save.

If the law given by God through Moses could not save, then the Amish Ordnung certainly cannot save. The Ordnung was not handed down from heaven. It was developed by men and varies from one Amish community to another.

What is forbidden in one settlement may be permitted in another. One group allows something that another group considers worldly. These differences show that the Ordnung is not the unchanging Word of God.

Human rules may have practical value within a community. Every family, church, school, and organization has certain rules. The problem comes when those rules are treated as though they determine a person's standing



before God.

Colossians 2 warns against placing believers under man-made religious rules. Paul wrote:

“Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,

“Touch not; taste not; handle not;

“Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?” (Colossians 2:20-22).

Paul was not teaching that Christians may live carelessly. He was warning against a religion built

upon outward rules that appear spiritual but cannot change the heart.

Colossians 2:23 says such things have *“a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body,”* but they do not have the power to defeat the sinful nature.

Changing clothing, transportation, hairstyles, and outward customs cannot create a new heart. Only the Spirit of God can do that.

Second Corinthians 5:17 says:

“Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

The Ordnung may regulate outward conduct, but it cannot produce the new birth. It has no power to save, justify, redeem, or cleanse the conscience.

7. Fear, Control, and the Power of Tradition

The fear of man is a powerful force. Proverbs 29:25 says:

“The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe.”

A snare is a trap. Fear of rejection, shunning, family separation, and condemnation can trap a person emotionally and spiritually.

Many Amish people are taught that disobeying the church is the same as disobeying God. When the distinction between God's commands and church traditions is removed, church leaders gain tremendous control over the individual.

A person may begin to believe that the bishop speaks with the same authority as Scripture. If the bishop says the person is rebellious, the person assumes God must also consider him rebellious. If the church says he is condemned, he fears that heaven has reached the same decision.

This is dangerous.

Church leaders are called to serve, teach, and shepherd God's people. They are not given permission to control the conscience or take the place of Christ.



First Peter 5:2-3 instructs church elders:

“Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly;

“Neither as being lords over God’s heritage but being ensamples to the flock.”

Leaders are not to act as lords over God's people. They are to lead by truth and godly example.

Second Corinthians 1:24 says:

“Not for that we have dominion over your faith but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand.”

A spiritual leader is a helper, not a ruler over another person's faith.

Whenever questions are forbidden, fear replaces truth. People may obey outwardly while their hearts remain confused, bitter, and afraid. That is not the kind of obedience God desires.

God wants obedience that flows from faith and love. Jesus said:

“If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Love for Christ is the motive. True Christian obedience is not produced by threats, intimidation, or fear of men. It grows from a heart that has been changed by grace.

8. Can a Christian Break an Unscriptural Vow?

The question of breaking a vow should never be treated carelessly. Scripture teaches us to keep our word and speak truthfully.

Jesus said:

“Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay” (Matthew 5:37).

However, not every promise is righteous simply because it was spoken. A person may make a promise without understanding what he is doing. He may be pressured into it, deceived, or asked to promise something contrary to God’s will. A sinful promise does not become righteous because it was called a vow.

Herod made a foolish promise that resulted in the death of John the Baptist. His promise did not justify the evil action that followed. He should have repented of his foolish words rather than carry out a sinful act.

Likewise, no person is required to keep a promise that forces him to disobey God.

The apostles understood this principle. When the religious authorities commanded them to stop preaching Christ, Peter answered:

“We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

The apostles were under authority, but that authority had commanded them to disobey God. Their first loyalty belonged to the Lord.



History also reminds us that many Reformers and Anabaptists separated from religious systems to which they had once belonged. Some had made formal promises connected to those churches. Yet when they became convinced that certain teachings were contrary to Scripture, they believed they must obey God rather than remain bound by human tradition.

If every religious vow were permanently binding, even when it stood against Scripture, there could never have been a Reformation. No one could ever leave a false religious system after discovering the truth.

This does not mean we should excuse every broken promise. It means that all vows must remain under the authority of God’s Word. A person troubled by vows made in ignorance or under pressure should take the matter honestly to the Lord. He can confess any sin involved, ask God for forgiveness, and rest in the cleansing power of Christ.

First John 1:9 says:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Even when we are uncertain how much guilt we carry, the answer is not to return to spiritual bondage. The answer is to bring the entire matter to the cross.

The blood of Christ is greater than our ignorance, fear, mistakes, and broken promises.

9. The Freedom Found in Jesus Christ

At an early age, I remember reading the account of Jesus speaking with Nicodemus. Jesus referred to the time when Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.

John 3:14-15 says:

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

“That whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

The Israelites who had been bitten by the serpents were dying. They could not heal themselves. God provided a remedy. They were told to look at the brass serpent and live.

In the same way, sinners cannot save themselves. We cannot remove our guilt by good behavior, church

membership, religious vows, or law keeping. We must look in faith to Jesus Christ, who was lifted up on the cross for us.

It was then that I reached out to Jesus by faith. Jesus reached out to me and lifted me into a place where a lifetime of vow making and rule keeping could never take me.

I discovered that salvation was not found in my ability to hold on to God. It was found in Christ's power to save and keep me.

Jesus said:

“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved” (John 10:9).



He continued:

“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10:10-11).

Jesus is the Door. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Jesus gave His life for the sheep.

Religious systems often create fear. Christ gives life. Human control produces bondage. Christ gives freedom. Traditions tell us to work harder so that we might someday be accepted. The gospel tells us that believers are accepted because of what Christ has done.

Hebrews 10:19-22 says:

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,

“By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh;

“And having an high priest over the house of God;

“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.”

Through the blood of Jesus, believers may come boldly into the presence of God. We do not have to approach Him through a bishop, minister, church system, or set of man-made rules.

Jesus Christ is our High Priest. He has opened the way.

10. Christ's Blood Is Greater Than Any Vow

First Peter 1:18-19 says:

“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”



To be redeemed means to be bought back, released, and set free. Peter says that we were not redeemed by earthly things or by the empty way of life handed down through tradition. We were redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.

Tradition may shape a culture, but it cannot save a soul. Church membership may identify us with a group, but it cannot remove sin. Vows may bind the conscience, but they cannot create peace with God.

Only the blood of Jesus can cleanse us from sin.

Many people are bowed down because they continually fall short of man-made standards.

They feel unacceptable to God because they have disappointed their parents, leaders, church, or community. They confuse failure before men with rejection by God.

But the believer's acceptance before God is not based upon perfect performance. It is based upon Christ.

Romans 5:1 says:

“Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

To be justified means that God declares the believing sinner righteous because of Jesus Christ. This is not something the sinner earns. It is a position God gives by grace.

If you made vows to the Amish church without understanding the gospel, or under pressure you did not know how to resist, bring those vows to the cross. Be honest with God. Confess any true sin. Ask Him to give you a clean conscience and guide you by His Word.

Do not allow men to claim authority that belongs only to Christ.

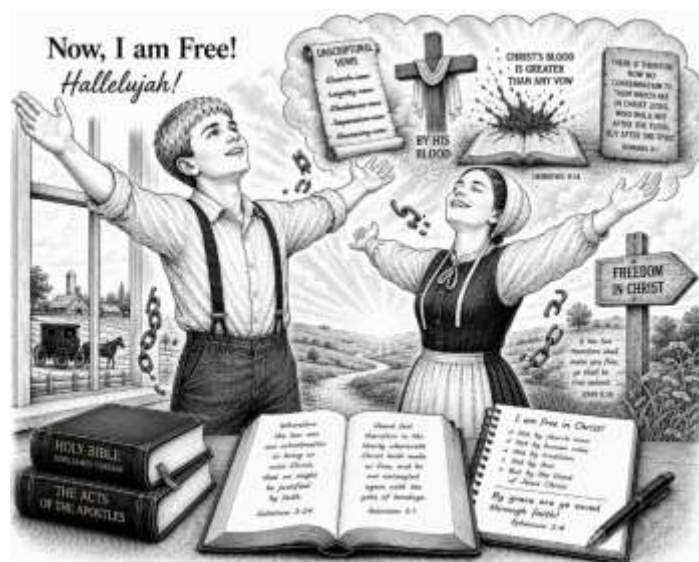
Do not place your hope in breaking vows or keeping vows. Place your hope in Jesus.

Marriage vows and other promises made before God should be taken seriously. But Scripture never teaches that a church-membership vow saves a person or gives a church lifelong ownership over his soul.

Salvation is in Christ alone.

Acts 4:12 says:

“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”



I once feared that breaking my vows had placed me beyond the reach of God. I now understand that the blood of Jesus is more than able to cleanse every sin and quiet every guilty conscience.

The answer to fear is not greater submission to human control. The answer is faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

The answer to guilt is not returning to bondage. The answer is the cross.

The answer to the question, “Are my vows to the Amish church binding?” must be settled by Scripture. No vow can save you. No church can take

the place of Christ. No promise made to men can cancel the promises God has made to those who believe.

Jesus said:

“Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

Come to Christ. Trust Him completely. Rest in His finished work.

His blood is greater than your vows.

Now, I am Free!

Hallelujah!

One former member of the Amish church said that, for her, excommunication from the church became a layer of God's protection. It separated her from condemnation, judgmentalism, spiritual darkness, inconsistency, confusion, and the bondage of man-made religion, and led her into peace, joy, liberty, and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

That made me think. Jesus, the apostles, and many of His followers were also excommunicated and shunned by family members and the religious leaders because they chose truth over tradition.

If you are walking through the pain of excommunication or shunning, remember that what feels like rejection may actually be God's way of leading you into freedom.

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free..." Galatians 5:1

Salvation Is God's Will for You

Salvation is God's will for you, made real in your life through Jesus Christ. Everything Christ died to provide is freely available through salvation. This includes a new life, peace with God, righteousness, mercy, love, faith, deliverance, and joy.

Receiving eternal life is like receiving a gift. You do not work for a gift, earn it, or pay for it. You simply receive it.

God offers eternal life through Jesus Christ. His promise is available to everyone who will believe and receive Him.

Why Do You Need to Be Born Again?

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

—Romans 5:12

Sin entered the world through Adam, and the results of sin passed upon all mankind. Every one of us has sinned and fallen short of God's perfect standard.

Romans 3:10 says:

"As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one."

None of us can make ourselves right with God. We may try to live a good life, help others, attend church, or follow religious traditions, but none of these things can remove our sin or give us a new heart.

That is why Jesus said, *"Ye must be born again"* (John 3:7).

God Wants to Give You a New Heart

God does not merely want to improve your old life. He wants to give you a new heart and a new life.

The Bible says:



"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. "And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."—Ezekiel 36:26-27

We all need a spiritual heart transplant. We need God to remove the hard, sinful heart and give us a heart that desires Him.

Without Christ, we are already under condemnation because of our sin. John 3:18 says:

"He that believeth on him is not condemned: but

he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

The good news is that Jesus came to save us from sin, condemnation, and eternal punishment. He died in our place and rose again so that we could be forgiven and receive everlasting life.

The New Birth Is for Everyone

The Bible says:

"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."—Romans 10:9

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."—Romans 10:13



Whosoever means you.

It does not matter who you are, where you come from, what you have done, or how deeply you have sinned. God's offer of salvation is for everyone who will come to Jesus Christ in repentance and faith.

Have you called upon His name?

There is no reason to wait. Second Corinthians 6:2 says:

"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

Do You Want to Be Born Again?



Ask yourself these questions:

Do you want to be forgiven and saved from all your sins?

Do you believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross for you and rose again?

Are you willing to turn to Jesus Christ?

Will you receive Him as the Lord and Savior of your life?

Salvation is not found in repeating certain words. It comes through placing your faith in Jesus Christ. However, you can speak to God from your heart and tell Him that you are trusting Him to save you.

You may pray something like this:

Dear Lord, the best I know how, I come to You and ask You to save me and give me a new heart. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that He came to earth, died on the cross for my sins, and rose again. I repent of my sins and place my faith in Jesus Christ alone. Please forgive every sin I have committed against You and save me now. Amen.

God's promise is clear in Romans 10:13

**“For whosoever shall call
upon the name of the Lord
shall be saved.”**