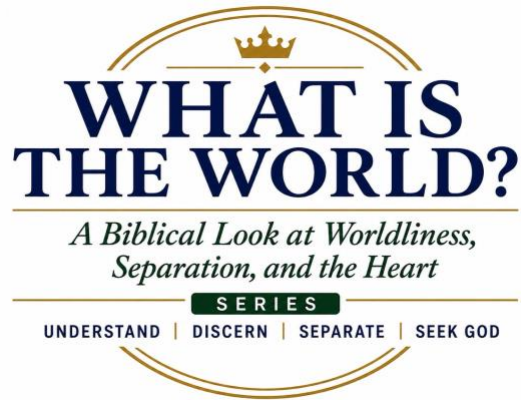




Lesson 5: The Fear of Man and the Danger of Tradition

1. What Does the Bible Mean by “The World”?	5. The Fear of Man and the Danger of Tradition
2. Plain on the Outside, Worldly on the Inside	6. Modesty, Technology, and Christian Liberty
3. The Sins We Do Not Always Call Worldly	7. Born Amish Is Not the Same as Born Again
4. Hidden Worldliness and the Lusts of the Flesh	8. You Can Leave the Amish and Still Miss Christ

Lesson Overview

The fear of man can become a powerful trap. A person may know what the Bible says but be afraid to follow it because of family, church leaders, friends, or the community. He may fear rejection, discipline, shame, or the loss of important relationships.

Traditions and church rules are not always wrong. They may help families and churches live with order and wisdom. The danger comes when human rules are treated as equal to God's Word. This lesson teaches us to test every belief by Scripture, speak the truth in love, and obey God even when obedience costs us something.

Main Scripture

Proverbs 29:25

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

Main Truth

God's Word must have greater authority than family pressure, church rules, or tradition. We should respect people and speak with love, but we must obey God rather than men.

Memory Verse

Acts 5:29

“Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.”

Section 1: The Fear of Man Is a Spiritual Trap

Daniel begins reading the New Testament for himself. He becomes convinced that salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and that a believer can know he has eternal life. Daniel is excited, but he is also afraid. He wonders what his parents will think. He fears that the ministers may call him proud and that friends may avoid him. Because asking questions may bring attention, Daniel stays quiet even while Scripture is working in his heart.

Daniel should not become rude or rebellious. He should honor his parents, respect his leaders, and speak with humility. Yet he must also decide whether fear will control him. The fear of man becomes a snare when the approval of people matters more than obedience to God.

Whom Are You Trying to Please?

Galatians 1:10

“For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.”

Paul understood the pressure to please people. He also understood that serving Christ must come first. We should listen to wise advice, but no person can take the place that belongs to God. Fear may keep someone from asking a Bible question, confessing sin, sharing the gospel, or following a clear command.

For Amish people, this fear can be very strong because family, church, work, neighbors, and social life are closely joined. Obedience may affect many relationships at once. We should never speak lightly about that cost. Still, trusting the Lord is safer than allowing fear to rule the heart.

Fear Can Keep Us From Confessing Christ

John 12:42-43

“Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: ⁴³ For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

These rulers feared rejection from their religious community. Their silence shows how powerful the praise of people can become. Each of us should ask whether the desire to remain accepted has become stronger than the desire to openly follow Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. What kinds of fear may keep a person from following a clear teaching of Scripture?
2. How can someone respect parents and church leaders without allowing them to replace God?
3. Why can the fear of rejection become especially strong in a close community?
4. Is there something God wants you to do that you have avoided because you fear people?

Section 2: Tradition Must Be Tested by Scripture

Samuel grew up in the same community as his father and grandfather. His family dresses a certain way, uses certain equipment, and avoids certain things because that is what their people have always done. One day his son asks, “Dad, where does the Bible say this is sin?” Samuel feels uncomfortable because he has never stopped to separate God’s commands from the traditions he received.

A tradition may be wise and helpful. It may protect a family from temptation or help a church live with order. But there is a difference between saying, “This is our practice,” and saying, “God has commanded this.” A human rule should never be given the same authority as Scripture.

The Commandments of Men

Mark 7:7-9

“Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. ⁸ For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. ⁹ And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.”

Jesus spoke to religious people who cared greatly about rules. Their mistake was allowing human commands to push aside God's commands. The same danger appears when a church is strict about an outward custom but overlooks lying, gossip, harshness, bitterness, pride, or dishonest business.

The Ordnung Is Not the Bible

Amos belongs to a church with a detailed Ordnung. It gives direction about buggies, clothing, equipment, and technology. Some rules were made with good intentions. But Amos begins to believe that keeping them proves he is right with God. At the same time, he speaks harshly to his wife, carries bitterness toward his brother, and sometimes lies in business.

Church rules can control outward actions, but they cannot give a person a new heart. An Ordnung may help a church function, but it was written by people. It may change from one district to another. The Bible does not change when we cross a county line.

Colossians 2:23

“Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body: not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.”

Outward rules may have an appearance of wisdom, yet they cannot conquer the sinful flesh. When Mary reads 1 John 5:13 and sees that believers may know they have eternal life, she must allow Scripture to correct what she has always heard. Our traditions must be tested by the Bible, not the Bible changed to protect our traditions.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between a wise church practice and a command from God?
2. How can an outward rule hide serious sins of the heart?
3. Why does the fact that Ordnung rules differ between districts matter?
4. If Scripture corrected a belief you had held for years, would you be willing to change?

Section 3: Obey God With Courage, Humility, and Love

The people of Berea listened to the apostle Paul, but they still compared his teaching with God's Word. They did not reject teaching in pride, and they did not accept it blindly. They received the message with a ready mind and searched the Scriptures to learn whether it was true.

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.”

If Paul's teaching could be tested by Scripture, the words of parents, ministers, bishops, teachers, and church traditions should also be tested. Searching the Bible is not rebellion. It is wisdom when it is done with a humble and teachable heart.

Speak the Truth in Love

Sarah becomes convinced from Scripture that salvation is a gift of grace and not something earned by works. She wants to speak with her parents. Sarah should listen, show respect, and avoid harsh words. She should not mock the church or act as though she knows everything. But she should not deny biblical truth simply to keep everyone comfortable.

Ephesians 4:15

“But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:”

Truth without love can become harsh. Love without truth can become compromise. We need both. Courage does not mean becoming angry or trying to prove everyone else wrong. It means following Christ faithfully while treating people with patience, kindness, and respect.

We Ought to Obey God

Acts 5:29

“Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.”

The apostles could have remained quiet and avoided trouble, but they obeyed God. There may be times when obedience costs friendships, approval, or comfort. When Scripture speaks clearly, the servant of Christ must follow God and trust Him with the results.

Good traditions may encourage simple living, family meals, hard work, modest clothing, and strong community. We can appreciate such things without trusting them to save us. A person may keep every tradition and still need to be born again. Our final authority is not family, community, bishop, minister, tradition, or Ordnung. It is the Word of God.

Discussion Questions

1. What can we learn from the Bereans about listening to teachers and studying the Bible?
2. How can a person speak biblical truth with both courage and love?
3. When does respect for people become disobedience to God?
4. If following God's Word cost you the approval of others, would Jesus Christ still be enough?