

**Why Be Plain?  
A Biblical Response**

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# **Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response**

David Servant

Peace Barn Press  
Pennsylvania

*Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*

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To every pure-hearted Plain person

*Take care how you listen; for whoever has, to him more shall be given; and whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has shall be taken away from him (Luke 8:18).*

# Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

Last year, I was given a copy of *Why Be Plain?* by some dear ex-Amish friends who told me that it was mailed to them by their still-Amish relatives. As soon as read it, I knew I had to write a response. Having spent so much time interacting with sincere Amish people over the past six years of my life, I had grown very fond of them, but at the same time, my heart had been broken.

None my Plain friends realized how far their Amish community had drifted from the faith of their forefathers—the original Anabaptists of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. None were benefiting from the centerpiece of that original faith—the spiritual rebirth that results in heart-obedience to Jesus' commandments. None were enjoying the wonderful fruit of the indwelling Spirit, listed in the New Testament as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22). None possessed assurance of salvation (see 1 John 5:13).

Once I read *Why Be Plain?* I better understood the reason. In short, biblical truth had been supplanted by hundreds of years of human tradition. Plain people possess a unique, inherited worldview that is designed to preserve itself at all costs. Plain traditions are preeminent. Nothing—even one's relationships with one's family members—is more important than protecting Plain traditions.

Knowing something about God's love for all people, I could not remain silent. To borrow a phrase from the apostle Paul, “the love of Christ constrained me” (see 2 Cor. 5:14).

It is obvious that the Old Order Mennonite authors of *Why Be Plain?*, Larry S. Weaver and Terry B. Zimmerman, are very concerned that Plain people, and especially their youth, are being led astray regarding the Plain faith and

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lifestyle, with the result that they are abandoning both to join more liberal churches or, worse, embrace “the world.” The fact that Weaver and Zimmerman have written a book to address their concern reveals that the problem is widespread and likely increasing.

I can certainly sympathize with their concern. All parents love their children, and they do not want them to be led astray in any way. For Plain parents, however, the thought of their children abandoning their faith and lifestyle is extremely distressing, because their Plain faith requires that they sever relationships with children who stray, shunning them to some degree (which varies from one Plain group to another). That in itself is distressing. But worse, their Plain faith also informs them that children who stray have no hope of eternal life, and that they will eventually find themselves in hell. Thus, Plain parents have no greater fear than that their children, other relatives, and friends will stray from their faith.

Naturally, anyone attempting to influence Plain people to question their beliefs or practices is perceived as a threat to be resisted, because there is too much at stake. Loved ones are at risk. Children may become estranged from their parents. Those who now have some hope of attaining heaven could become destined for hell.

I have become acutely aware of that understandable fear since I became involved, three years ago, in publishing a magazine for Amish people, *The Awakening!* The stated goal of that magazine is to help Amish people reclaim their wonderful Anabaptist heritage. I believe firmly that unless the Amish return to their original roots and the faith of their fathers, the current exodus of Amish youth (and older people) will only accelerate. I suspect the same is true for all Plain groups.

Some Amish people blame *The Awakening!* magazine for the current exodus, but tens of thousands had already left the Amish over the past decades, long before we ever started publishing. Moreover, we have never encouraged our readers to leave the Amish<sup>1</sup> and, in fact, have encouraged them to remain Amish for as long as possible. But there is nothing we can do to stop Amish communities from excommunicating Amish people for “adopting a new faith” who have actually reclaimed their Anabaptist heritage and been born again.

My heart’s desire is that every Plain person who has not yet experienced the new birth would experience it. It is never my desire that Plain families would be broken apart. In fact, I am working to reconcile broken Plain families by promoting a biblical gospel that has the power to reconcile *every* shattered relationship (more about that later in this book).

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<sup>1</sup> The exception would be when readers are being verbally, physically, or sexually abused.

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The exodus of Plain people from their communities should give all Plain people reason to pause and ask why so many do leave, especially in light of the fact that everyone who does so fully understands the dire consequences. They all know that their families, friends, and entire communities will disapprove of them, officially vote to excommunicate them, and then shun them to some degree for the rest of their lives (or until they return and ask forgiveness).<sup>2</sup> Some know they will lose their jobs if their employers are Plain (and if those employers are willing to break federal laws that prohibit religious discrimination). Some employers know that they will lose their Plain employees. Some know that they will be disinherited. Yet they make the decision to leave. *Why?*

“The lure of the world” is often blamed for their defection. “They just want to drive cars, have smartphones, and wear the world’s clothing” is a prevailing explanation.

But think about that commonly repeated accusation for a moment. Does anyone really believe that some Plain people are willing to permanently forsake their relationships with their families, relatives and friends, lose their jobs, forfeit their inheritances, and adjust to an entirely new lifestyle just so they can drive cars, own smart phones and wear different clothing? That explanation seems far-fetched. Obviously, something deeper has motivated thousands of Plain people to pay such a high price in order to escape Plain life. What is it?

Significantly, many Plain people who leave their communities do not abandon church life or Christianity. Granted, some land in churches that downplay the necessity of holiness and obedience to Christ’s commandments. It becomes very clear that Jesus is not their Lord (and He likely never was). But with many others, that is not the case. They may no longer be keeping the peculiar practices that uniquely mark Plain people, but they are very much striving to obey all of Jesus’ commandments. Many will tell you that they are living much more obediently to God than they ever were when they were Plain, and their lives are the proof. They can enumerate the differences. I know many such ex-Plain people.

If you are a Plain person, do you know anyone who has left one Plain community to join another one? From my observations, Amish people frequently do that. Many do it multiple times over the years. And the reason, most often, *has something to do with the ordnung*. They don’t agree with some of the rules, so they move to where they think the rules are a little different. Their move often results in tensions or broken relationships within their immediate and

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2 It should be noted that, among young adults who depart from a Plain lifestyle, those who have not yet been baptized are generally treated less harshly than those who have been baptized (and who made vows to the church).

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extended families. Yet the reasons to leave outweigh their reasons to stay. So they leave and endure the consequences, whatever they are.

Can you see that what I have just described is no different than what happens when Plain people leave Plain life entirely? In both cases, people don't agree with something, so they move. And in many cases of those who leave the Plain lifestyle entirely, what they don't agree with is all the rules and traditions that can't be found in the Bible. They disagree on spiritual, biblical grounds, and they are willing to pay a significant price to escape.

My claim is certainly supported by the book *Why Be Plain?* and even by its title. It is a refutation of the reasons Plain people give for leaving the Plain churches. The authors do their best to find the flaws in those reasons. In the pages that follow, I will point out where their arguments do and do not align with Scripture.

I hope that my love for all Plain people will be obvious in the pages that follow. They have been born into a religious system that has been passed down from their ancestors. Most don't realize, however, that what has been passed down has not remained faithful to what was taught and practiced by the original Anabaptists. This is why I will at times be referring to the eighteen articles of the 1632 Dordrecht Confession, to which all Anabaptists, including all Plain groups, subscribe. At the source of the "Anabaptist River," the water is biblically pure and safe to drink from, whereas downstream, the waters have been muddied.

I've written primarily to Old Order Amish readers, as I am most familiar with them. I live in the midst of Pennsylvania's third-largest Old Order Amish community, and my magazine's readers are primarily Old Order Amish. What I have written, however, has application to all Plain groups, as I am responding to a book written by Old Order Mennonite authors for a Plain audience. This writing project consumed months of my time, but my love for Plain people kept me motivated.

If someone gave you this book as a gift, it is an expression of love for you on their part. Perhaps you mailed copies of *Why Be Plain?* to your formerly Plain family members, and now those same family members have reciprocated by mailing this book to you. That shows that you both desire a mended relationship. This book can help build that bridge.

The best way to read what follows is with a copy of *Why Be Plain?* nearby for reference,<sup>3</sup> although that is not essential, as most of the reasoning found within the pages of *Why Be Plain?* is familiar to Plain people. I've quoted

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3 At the time of this writing, *Why Be Plain?* is not available on Amazon.com. It is available, however, at homemessenger.net and through local bookstores.

## *Introduction*

the authors more than 130 times, and I've quoted Bible passages even more often. Generally, I've followed the progression of *Why Be Plain?* chapter by chapter. I recommend starting from the beginning of this book rather than with a chapter that might hold special interest, because my later chapters build on my earlier chapters.

Any Plain reader who respects the Word of God and has an open mind will likely be challenged in a positive way. My hope is that God will be honored by the unveiling of truth from His precious Word and that Plain people across North America will rediscover their biblical spiritual heritage to enjoy all that their ancestors did, which all starts with the new birth. May the Lord help us on our journey.

David Servant  
April 2025



# Chapter 1

## A Working Faith

WBP? Chapter 2, pages 13-43

Chapter 1 of *Why Be Plain?* introduces a number of themes that Weaver and Zimmerman elaborate on in later chapters. One of those themes is the threat of “easy-believism,” which the authors define on page 3:

On top of that, the message of easy-believism preachers have reached the ears of many, teaching that one’s lifestyle has nothing to do with being a Christian.

That particular theme is fully addressed in Chapter 2 of *Why Be Plain?*, titled “A Working Faith.” For the most part, the chapter is biblically sound. Along with many others, I have been warning about the same danger for decades. I refer to this danger as the “false-grace gospel,” which is not only a threat to Plain people but to everyone who desires eternal life. Allow me to elaborate.

Anyone who has read the Bible knows that salvation depends on God’s grace, because all of us have sinned, disobeying our Creator. He has written His moral law on every conscience, and we are without excuse (Rom. 2:14–16). Therefore, if we hope to escape our rightful punishment, we need forgiveness, and forgiveness, of course, is predicated upon grace.

What is grace? It is often defined as “unmerited favor.” That is because grace cannot be deserved or earned; otherwise it is not grace.

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Perhaps the most well-known passage in the New Testament regarding the fact that salvation is by grace is Ephesians 2:8–9:

*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast (emphasis added).*

Because of that passage and others like it, some have concluded that there can be no behavioral requirement connected to salvation; otherwise, they claim, “salvation is not by grace, but by works.” Such folks often talk about the *unconditional* grace of God. God’s grace can’t be conditional, they claim, for then salvation would not be by grace.

But hundreds of New Testament passages contradict this idea of salvation by “unconditional grace.” One of them is the very passage I just quoted, Ephesians 2:8–9. Paul wrote that we are saved “by grace ... *through faith*.” Our salvation does not hinge just on grace; it also hinges on faith. Obviously, grace is God’s part in salvation, and just as obviously, we have something to do with the faith part. Both facts are repeatedly affirmed in Scripture.

So for someone to benefit from God’s saving grace, he must have faith. If salvation’s only component was grace, then everyone would be saved, because Jesus died for everyone (1 John 2:2), God desires for everyone to be saved (1 Tim. 2:3; 2 Pet. 3:9), and His grace is extended toward everyone (Tit. 2:11). But not everyone benefits from God’s saving grace, because not all meet the condition of God’s *conditional* grace, which is faith.

### **Faith That Saves**

Of course, *saving* faith is not just faith that the sun will rise tomorrow, or that a man named Jesus walked the earth 2,000 years ago. Saving faith is *faith in a divine person*. That person is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the object of faith that saves. The Bible’s most well-known verse affirms this fact:

*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16, emphasis added).*

What a wonderful promise! Those who believe in a unique person—God’s only begotten Son—shall not perish but will have eternal life.

Obviously, it is not just ten seconds of faith in Jesus, followed by a lifetime of unbelief, that save a person from perishing (as some strangely claim). It is faith that *continues to* believe in Jesus. That is why the original apostles repeatedly encouraged believers to “continue in the faith.” For example, the apostle Paul wrote:

Yet He [Jesus] has now reconciled you [to God] in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless

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and beyond reproach—if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard (Col. 1:22–23a, emphasis added).

Many other New Testament scriptures affirm that same fact. The apostles not only encouraged believers to “continue in the faith” (Col. 1:22–23; Acts 14:22), but also to “remain true to the Lord” (Acts 11:23), “not grow weary of doing good” (2 Thess. 3:13; Gal. 6:9), “hold fast to their confession” (Heb. 3:6, 14; 4:14; 10:23; 1 Cor. 15:2; Rev. 2:12; 3:11), and run with endurance the race that is set before them” (Heb. 12:1).

### **Faith’s Fruit**

Naturally, anyone who truly believes in Jesus—the “King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16)—will strive to obey Him. That is why Paul wrote of “the obedience of faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26).

That is why Peter wrote that by practicing godliness, “the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you” (2 Pet. 1:11).

That is why John wrote, “By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments” (1 John 2:3).

That is why James wrote that faith without works is dead, useless, and cannot save (Jas. 2:14–26).

And that is why Jude warned about false teachers “who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness [a license to sin] and [in so doing] deny our only *Master* and *Lord*, Jesus Christ” (Jude 4, emphasis added). The five apostles who wrote the New Testament letters could not have made it clearer.

Clearly, the proof of continued faith is continued obedience. Saving faith starts with repentance and continues with obedience. Anything less is not saving faith.

And this is what Weaver and Zimmerman similarly warn against in the second chapter of *Why Be Plain?* According to them, numbers of Plain people have been deceived by the false-grace gospel that is prevalent in so many North American churches. That is indeed tragic. Later in this chapter, I will try to explain why Plain people, in particular, are so susceptible to that false gospel. But first, here is a helpful paragraph penned by Weaver and Zimmerman:

The salvation-by-faith-alone theory [that is, an alleged faith that is void of works] ... is likely a big factor in the decisions of various people to move on from an Old Order setting, since it helps them think salvation has nothing to do with what we do, but only with what we believe. Some theologians bring so much discredit to good works and obedience that

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it has become a negative term to many professing Christians. It makes them suspicious of living holy lives for fear that it might be a denial of faith and a rejection of Christ—in spite of the fact that Christ clearly taught that those who do not obey Him are the ones who reject Him! Satan has twisted man's understanding of the Bible to where they are more afraid of the works of God than the works of the devil!

And thus it's not only unnecessary to strictly obey the Bible. It is viewed as sin! (p. 15).

That appraisal is tragically true. The false-grace gospel reduces faith to nothing more than mental acknowledgement that may not produce any fruit of obedience. Weaver and Zimmerman add:

As a holy God, He [Jesus] cannot overlook unholy, unrepentant lives. On the Day of Judgment, He will sit on the throne, dividing the saved from the unsaved. All our works are written in a book, and we will be judged according to our works written therein. The Holy Bible will be the standard we'll be judged by—according to whether we followed its teachings (p. 16).

In the second sentence of this last quotation, the authors seem to be citing Jesus' warning found in His foretelling of the judgment of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25:31–46). At that judgment, the eternal destiny of everyone will be determined by whether or not they cared for those whom Jesus referred to as “the least of these my brothers”—believers who suffered from hunger, thirst, homeless, lack of sufficient clothing, being ill, or imprisonment. Those who cared for “the least of these” will inherit God's kingdom and eternal life. Those who did not will be cast into eternal fire (Matt. 25:34, 41, 46).

Jesus said nothing about faith in that particular warning, and that can only be because genuine faith always results in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ and love for brothers and sisters in Christ (1 John 2:3; 3:14). So all of us should ask ourselves if we will be among the sheep or goats at that future judgment. Are we making sacrifices for those whom Jesus referred to as the “least of these His brothers”? If we aren't, then we're goats. We prove by our actions that we really don't believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, even if we think we do.

Jesus' warning in that passage motivated me, decades ago, to launch a Christian organization called *Heaven's Family*, which, with the generous help of thousands of followers of Christ, serves poor and suffering believers all over the world. We do it because we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and all that He said. We obey Him because we believe in Him. It is just that simple. Weaver and Zimmerman clearly state that “the Holy Bible will be the standard we'll be judged by—according to whether we followed its teachings.” The only thing I say differently is that we will be judged specifically by whether or not we obeyed the commandments of Christ.

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### **Paul's Conditional Grace**

Later in chapter 2, Weaver and Zimmerman point out that although Paul told the Ephesian believers that they were “saved by grace” (Eph. 2:8–9), just a few paragraphs later, in the same letter, he warned them about the danger of disobedience:

But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God (Eph. 5:3-5).

Clearly, Paul believed the Ephesian Christians were capable of committing immorality, impurity and greed, or else he would not have admonished them to avoid all three. And he further warned them that “no immoral or impure person or covetous man ... has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.” So the grace by which they were saved was conditional.

Weaver and Zimmerman also respond to the often-used argument that another of Paul's letters, Galatians, proves that obedience has nothing to do with ultimate salvation because salvation is by grace. The authors wisely point out that if that were true, Paul would have had no reason to warn the Galatian Christians in the same letter that certain sinful behaviors could cause them to forfeit their inheritance in God's kingdom:

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that *those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God* (Gal. 5:19–21, emphasis added).

All this proves that the grace God is offering to all of humanity through Jesus is not a license to sin. Rather, it is a temporary opportunity to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, turn from one's rebellion, be forgiven of all one's past sins, be spiritually reborn, be set free from captivity to sin, be empowered to obey Him by the indwelling Holy Spirit, be forgiven of any future sins through confession, and inherit eternal life in His eternal kingdom. *That is salvation by grace through faith.*

### **The Nonsense of Unconditional Grace**

The idea of unconditional grace is actually foreign to the Bible, just as it is in human experience. If you have ever been a father or a mother, you know that. Sometimes your children may disobey you, but you don't discipline them immediately. Rather, you warn them. That is an example of conditional grace.

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You aren't giving your disobedient child a license to disobey you. Rather, you are showing your child conditional grace in the hope that they won't disobey again. If your child does disobey again in the same way, they probably won't enjoy the same grace that you offered after their initial disobedience.

Here's another example. Imagine that you are caught by a state policeman driving your buggy down the wrong side of the road. Imagine him saying to you, "I'm not going to issue a citation that will require you to pay a \$500 fine. I'm going to show you grace." Is his grace "unconditional"? If you want to find out, just thank him for his grace and then continue driving down the road on the wrong side. You will soon discover that his grace was conditioned upon your repentance!

Recall that Jesus warned, "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matt. 6:15). Obviously, forgiveness from our Heavenly Father is an expression of His grace. It is undeserved favor. But His forgiveness hinges on us forgiving others. His grace hinges on our grace. So His grace is conditional. Conditional grace is still grace.

The very idea that unless grace is unconditional, it is not grace is absurd. God's saving grace is undeniably conditional. This is why Paul wrote about God's grace:

*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds (Tit. 2:11–14, emphasis added).*

That was the apostle Paul's gospel of grace. Again, God's grace is not a license to sin (as it is portrayed in so many churches today). Rather, it is a call to repentance and an opportunity to be purified and prepared for Christ's return.

Clearly, a behavioral standard is required to ultimately inherit God's kingdom, and Paul repeatedly refers to it. We have already considered warnings found in Ephesians and Galatians. Here is another one from 1 Corinthians:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9–11).

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It is indeed tragic that so many Plain people have fallen for the false-grace gospel. They are joining millions of non-Plain people in their deception, and when they wake up, it may well be too late. Their opportunity to rightly respond to God's gracious offer may have passed.

### **The Unwitting Contribution to Plain People's Deception**

Based on what they wrote in chapter 2, I'm sure Weaver and Zimmerman would never intend to drive any Plain person into the deception of the false-grace gospel. Tragically, however, they inadvertently do that very thing when they promote, in the same chapter, extra-biblical, Plain traditions as essential components of saving faith.

As we have seen, obedience to Christ's commandments is an essential component of saving faith. But Weaver and Zimmerman make obedience to the ordnung essential as well. That adds the weight of hundreds of extra rules that must be followed, rules that were never required or mentioned by Jesus or His apostles. That heavy burden often pushes people to look for an escape, which makes them extremely vulnerable to the false-grace gospel. Tragically, they embrace a message that removes all responsibility to obey Christ's commandments. I have seen it happen over and over again.<sup>4</sup>

Immediately after Weaver and Zimmerman expose the fallacy promoted by the false-grace gospel that holiness is not essential, they lament:

Now it doesn't matter if you disobey the church, how you dress, what you own, or what you do. It doesn't matter if you live like the world as long as you have mentally accepted the correct beliefs (p. 15).

The authors don't bemoan the idea that, under the deception of the false-grace gospel, people assume they can ignore the plight of the "least of these," practice immorality or greed, or commit any of the other sins Paul listed in 1 Corinthians, Galatians and Ephesians that prevent people from inheriting God's kingdom. Rather, they focus on ordnung rules. That may not be so evident to non-Plain readers, but it is certainly clear to Plain readers.

If I was to paraphrase, for the benefit of non-Plain readers, the two sentences I just quoted from *Why Be Plain?*, they would read something like this:

Now it doesn't matter if you disobey the church [that is, if you disobey the hundreds of ordnung rules that are enforced by Plain church leaders], how you dress [that is, if you keep the scores of ordnung regulations about outward attire], what you own, [that is, if you own what is forbid-

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<sup>4</sup> I've even had former Amish people who claim to be born again, but who have embraced the false-grace gospel, refer to me as a "wolf in sheep's clothing and a "false prophet" because I teach that obedience to Christ is a necessary component of saving faith.

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den by the ordnung, such as cars and cell phones], or what you do [that is, what you do that transgresses any other ordnung rules]. It doesn't matter if you live like the world [that is, not wearing clothing that identifies you as Plain, driving cars, owning cell phones and other technologies and so on], as long as you have mentally accepted the correct beliefs.

To Weaver and Zimmerman, keeping the ordnung is just as important as keeping Christ's commandments. A few pages later, they write:

If we truly live for Christ, His commandments are not grievous, *neither are the rules of the church* hard to keep, since they help us live out His commandments (p. 22, emphasis added).

Clearly, in the minds of the authors, "living for Christ" entails both keeping Christ's commandments and keeping the rules of the church. That is an admission that church rules are different from Christ's commandments and yet are of equal importance. The justification given for the hundreds of church rules that govern every aspect of Plain life is that "they help us live out His commandments" (p. 22).

That may sound good but, as I will show later in this book, the ordnung actually causes Plain people to live out Jesus' commandments *as they interpret them through Plain lenses*, and not as the early Christians or the original Anabaptists interpreted them. Moreover, ordnungs also help Plain people follow age-old traditions that have no connection to Jesus' commandments or to any moral, ethical, or biblical principle.

My point here is that the heavy weight of ordnungs makes Plain people vulnerable to the deception of the false-grace gospel. If Plain people want to see fewer people depart from their ranks, if they want to keep their families intact, if they desire more harmony and unity and less division, and (most importantly) if they want to see more of their family members and friends in heaven, they should to take a look at their ordnungs in the light of the New Testament. I hope to help in that regard in the remainder of this book.

Not only do Plain people often interpret some of Jesus' commandments differently than the large majority of professing Christians currently on planet Earth (as well as the original Christians), but they also interpret key biblical phrases differently. One of those phrases is "the world," a biblical phrase we will consider in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2

# The Lure of the World, Part 1

WBP? Chapter 1, pages 1-3

It is no surprise that the title of the first chapter of *Why Be Plain?* is “The Lure of the World.” That’s because the lure of the world is so often blamed for Plain people leaving Plain churches. Most Plain folks have heard their share of sermons warning them about the dangers of “the world.” They are quite familiar with the New Testament warnings:

And do not be conformed to this world (Rom. 12:2).

Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God (James 4:4).

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15).

Clearly, Christians should not be conformed to the world, be friends of the world, or love the world and its things. If they do, they make themselves God’s enemies and prove that they don’t love Him. But what were Paul, James and John referring to when they spoke of “the world”?

### **The Plain Definition of “the World”**

Chapter 1 of *Why Be Plain?* begins, like every chapter, with a fictitious conversation between two young men, cousins Dan and Steve, who have both decided not to join their parents’ Plain church. In this conversation, Dan and

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Steve discuss their doubts about the ordnung's prohibitions against modern technology. Their conversation ends with Dan asking, "So if Christians can own cars, have smart phones, and still go to heaven, then why be Plain?"

Indeed, cars and smart phones are hot issues in Plain circles. As the authors begin to address Dan and Steve's objections, they reveal the Plain perception of "the world." Clearly, a major component of that perception is modern technology. Weaver and Zimmerman begin their response to Dan and Steve as follows:

"Why be Plain?"

More and more youth are asking that question. Even older people, as well as entire churches, are asking it.

There are still a multitude of Plain People in America who are well separated from *the world*. But it's not getting easier. With all the wonders of *modern technology* beckoning with its *lure of an easy, comfortable and entertaining lifestyle*, fewer people want to shun what *the world has to offer* and live the Old Order and Scriptural lifestyle of nonconformity (p. 3, emphasis mine).

In other words, modern technology that makes one's lifestyle "easy" or "comfortable" or is "entertaining" has lured some Plain people to succumb to the "the world." For that reason, in Plain thinking, modern technology should be shunned. It is "worldly."

In this chapter, I address the authors' concerns about modern technology that makes life "easier" or "comfortable." In the next chapter, I will address their concerns about modern technology that is entertaining.

### **Plain Tech**

In the minds of Weaver and Zimmerman, what makes life "easy" or "comfortable" is apparently wrong, although they offer no scriptural support for their view. Ironically, however, when compared to most of human history, all Plain people regularly use relatively modern technology that makes their lives easier and more comfortable. Let's take some examples from the Old Order Amish.

Chain saws are generally permitted in Amish communities. They are a relatively modern technology that makes live much easier for Amish loggers, as well as for those who heat their homes with firewood. For most of human history, people have not enjoyed the immense benefits of chain saws.

Combustion engines are often permitted in Amish groups to power mechanized woodworking tools. They make life much easier for the Amish cabinet makers and woodworkers who use them every day.

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Tractors are often permitted to power certain farm machinery, as long as they are not used for plowing fields, something reserved for horses. They make life easier for Amish farmers.

Some Amish groups permit the use of cell phones, smart phones, computers, or internet connections in certain contexts, such as when conducting business. Despite any remaining restrictions, the use of these technologies for business purposes certainly makes Amish lives easier. Just about all Amish people regularly use community pay phones. That's another relatively-modern technology that makes their lives easier.

Most Amish groups allow women to wash clothes utilizing old-style wringer washers (powered by combustion engines).

All Amish groups allow the ownership and use of rifles, bullets, and scopes. That can make feeding their families much easier than if they still relied on the hunting methods used by their 16th-century ancestors.

No Amish groups allow the driving of automobiles, but some do allow truck ownership for a business, as long as the trucks are driven by non-Amish drivers. Amish adults regularly pay non-Amish people who own autos to transport them. Regardless of who is driving, this is unquestionably a use of modern technology that makes Amish lives easier (especially in winter).

Most all Amish people use 12-volt automobile batteries to power nighttime headlights and tail lamps on their buggies. Batteries and lightbulbs are modern technologies.

The list of modern and semi-modern technologies and products that make Amish lives easier and more comfortable is almost endless. Amish people purchase modern products at Walmart. They wear eyeglasses. They clad the exterior of their homes with vinyl siding that never needs painting. They wear clothing woven by modern industrial machines. They live in homes that feature drywall and double-pane windows. They draw water from the ground with pumps and direct spring water through pipes manufactured in modern factories. All these things make their lives easier and more comfortable. Even Amish buggies were at one time a new technology.

### **The Inevitable Questions**

Seen from that perspective, Plain people accept 95% of modern technology that has appeared in the past 130 years, and they shun about 5%. All that acceptance of technologies that make their lives easier and more comfortable provokes Plain people who think about the matter to question why certain modern technologies are forbidden. Plain children, for example, inevitably ask their parents, "Why can we ride in cars but not own them or drive them ourselves?" It doesn't make any sense to them. And when parents can't pro-

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vide any logical or biblical reason, it doesn't build the children's confidence in the Plain lifestyle or faith. When parents tell their inquisitive children—who are using their God-given brains—that it is wrong to ask such questions, they are unwittingly setting them up to ultimately abandon their Plain lifestyle when they become adults.

Plain people also wonder why all the modern and semi-modern technologies they use every day are not considered “worldly.” If technology that makes life easier and more comfortable is inherently evil, why don't Plain people winnow their wheat by riding donkeys over wheat stalks, as their ancestors did? Why don't they live in caves, sleep on the ground, wear only animal skins, and cook over campfires, shunning all man-made things that make life easier and more comfortable?

Plain people also notice all the differences among Plain groups regarding which modern technologies are acceptable and which are not. How could a certain technology be “worldly” in one Plain community and not in another one? And why do all Plain groups allow certain technologies today that they once forbade? Obviously, the determination is based on subjective judgments.

Plain people who search the Bible and the 1632 Dordrecht Confession<sup>5</sup> for warnings against any kind of technology that makes life easier or more comfortable will find none, even though in Bible times and in the 17th century—as in all times of human history—people were inventing ways to make their lives easier and more comfortable. Making one's life easier or more comfortable is not inherently evil. It is God-given human nature. That is why we all wear coats when it is cold outside.

There is nothing virtuous about shunning something, and nothing sinful about desiring something, that would make life easier. Jesus and His apostles used a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee when they could have attempted to swim across or walk along the shore. A boat, however, made it much easier. Some of those same apostles used nets to catch fish. That was an innovation of their day that made their daily lives much easier.

### **What about Enduring Hardship?**

Of course, the Bible encourages Christians to endure hardship, but it is not referring to self-generated hardship, as if there is some virtue in making things more difficult for oneself. Rather, the hardships are related to being “persecuted for the sake of righteousness” (Matt. 5:10). Plain people who decide to repent and follow the Lord Jesus Christ (which results in their spiritual rebirth) even if they will be excommunicated and shunned by their unregenerate (non-born-again) Plain community are not choosing a path that

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<sup>5</sup> In fact, there is no warning about “the world” in any of the 18 articles of the Dordrecht Confession.

## *The Lure of the World, Part 1*

will make their lives easier or more comfortable. They are choosing a path of hardship.

On the other hand, Plain people who resist the call of obedience to Christ alone to remain accepted by their Plain group are choosing an easier and more comfortable path. It is thus somewhat ironic that the authors of *Why Be Plain?* accuse those who leave the Plain church of pursuing an easier and more comfortable life (by adopting the 5% of modern technology that Plain people shun) when, in fact, those leaving are choosing a path that will be less easy and comfortable in significant ways.

### **The Biblical Definition of “the World”**

Now let us return to the original question. What were the apostles Paul, James, and John referring to when they warned of “the world”? Obviously, they were not writing about cars, phones, or any other technology that didn’t exist in the first century. Thankfully, they all elaborated on what they did mean. Let’s look at their warnings in context.

**Paul:** “Do not be conformed to *this world*, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2, emphasis added).

Paul was obviously not referring to “the world” in a geographic sense. Rather, he was referring to the body of people in the world who are not submitted to the Lord Jesus Christ. “The world” is not demonstrating what the will of God is because the world is not obeying God’s commandments. As Christians progressively renew their minds with God’s Word, however, they are transformed and obey His Word. They stand in contrast to the world *in their behavior*. They “prove” (by their lifestyle) “what the will of God is,” because they obey His commandments. That is what not conforming to the world means.

Applying this lesson to our modern context, Christians should not use technology as the world uses it. The world might use their cars to transport illegal drugs or to visit prostitutes, but followers of Christ will not. The world might use their smart phones to view porn, but followers of Christ will not.

**James:** “You adulteresses [the KJV says “adulterers and adulteresses”], do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (Jas. 4:4).

According to the dictionary, friends “share a bond of mutual affection.” They often have similar interests, beliefs, and behaviors. The reason why true followers of Christ cannot be friends with the world is that they are—as Jesus’ devoted bride—submitted to Him, whereas unbelievers have not submitted to Jesus, remaining enemies of God. If Christians become friends with the

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world, they become friends of God's enemies. Even worse, they make themselves spiritual adulteresses, because they previously pledged to be faithful to Him.

This, of course, does not mean that Christians cannot associate with non-Christians. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians:

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the *immoral people of this world*, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one (1 Cor 5:9–11, emphasis added).

True Christians should not associate with professing Christians who are “worldly”—that is, sexually immoral, greedy, drunkards, and so on—because such professing Christians stain the church and will not inherit God's kingdom (see 1 Cor. 6:9–10).

Finally, **John**: “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever” (1 John 2:15).

According to John, three characteristics of “the world” are the “lust of the flesh,” the “lust of the eyes,” and the “boastful pride of life.” These three characteristics are universal among those who are not born again and not submitted to the Lord Jesus Christ—and they always have been. Let's first consider the “lust of the flesh.”

We should not assume John was writing only about sexual lust when he mentioned “the lust of the flesh.” The Greek word translated “lust” in 1 John 2:16 is *epithumia*, often translated “desire” in other places in the New Testament. For example, Paul wrote to the Galatian Christians:

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire (*epithumia*) of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire (*epithumeo*) against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please (Gal. 5:16–17).

So, when Christians “walk by the Spirit,” they do not carry out the “desire of the flesh.” One verse later, Paul enumerates the deeds that are committed by those who yield to the “desire of the flesh”:

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity,

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sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19–21).

Putting this all together, those who “love the world” are those who yield to the “desire of the flesh,” which then manifests as sexual immorality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outburst of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and similar sins. So when John warned about “the world,” those are the things he was warning against. People whose lives are characterized by those behaviors are “worldly.”

Those who are familiar with Plain culture know that some (not all, of course) Plain people are regularly involved in “enmities, strife ... disputes, dissensions, factions” with other members of their communities as well as with other Plain communities. The strife often revolves around ordnung rules and is “resolved” by geographic relocation and/or by shunning. In not getting along with each other, such folks are no different from the world in that respect. They are “worldly.”

Some Plain people (not all of course) who would never own a smart phone or car are frequently or sporadically guilty of sexual immorality. The number of Plain people, for example, who have suffered sexual abuse as children and teenagers—by older siblings, fathers, or relatives—is shocking. We will return to this problem later in this book, but suffice it to say for now that those who commit such vile acts are *certainly* worldly. I just finished reading a book by a former Amish woman who, when she was a young teenager, worked as a “maude” for a family in her Amish community. She was raped 26 times by the married man for whom she worked, and decades later he admitted it in court. Yet during his court appearance, his Amish community sided with him and against her, primarily because she had left the Amish and exposed him. How perverse! Tragically, in his mind at the time of his rapes, he was living a “non-worldly” Amish lifestyle because he drove a buggy and wore Amish clothing. But his vile behavior made him *worse* than “the world” (1 Cor. 5:1).

Regarding John’s second identifying characteristic of those who love the world—“lust [or desire] of the eyes”—it must be something different from the “lust [or desire] of the flesh” since John listed it separately. The expression “lust of the eyes” is not found elsewhere in the New Testament, and it is not similarly defined anywhere in Scripture, as is the phrase “lust of the flesh.” So we must speculate.

I suspect that “the lust of the eyes” refers to coveting and greed, as both generally involve the eyes and they are sins common among non-Christians that are condemned elsewhere in Scripture. In Bible times, the expression “evil eye” was used to denote greed (see Prov. 28:22; Luke 11:34). In the next

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few chapters, we will explore in more detail what coveting, greed, and “the love of money” actually are.

Finally, John wrote that “the boastful pride of life” is also a behavioral characteristic of the “loving the world.” This can only be the all-pervasive pride possessed by all unregenerate people, who see no need to humble themselves in repentance and submission to God. Pride blinds them to their deep spiritual poverty.

Now that we better understand Paul, James, and John’s warnings about “the world,” we are better equipped to compare them with Plain warnings.

## Chapter 3

### The Lure of the Word, Part 2

WBP? Chapter 1, pages 9–11

As we saw in the previous chapter, when Paul, James, and John warned their readers about “the world,” they were warning about sins that characterize those who are not submitted to the Lord Jesus Christ and His commandments. They did not invent hundreds of fence laws in an attempt to corral Christians into some semblance of obedience while creating a unique culture, the peculiarities of which had very little or nothing to do with biblical morality.

Moreover, they warned about sins that were actually threats to Christians living in the first century, not about modern technologies that make life easier or more comfortable.

Of course, just about any material thing that is used for good could also be used for evil. A hammer could be used to kill someone, but that doesn’t make hammers inherently evil. An automobile could be used to transport illegal drugs, but that doesn’t make autos evil. In fact, 99.99% of the time that automobiles are used, they are used for good purposes.

Why, then, are Plain leaders so fearful that Plain people—who are supposed to be lovers of God and followers of Christ—will use cars for evil? Is that really their concern, or are they just trying to protect a tradition, which they’ve heard from childhood, that driving cars is simply something that Plain people don’t do?

Smart phones have many positive uses. They help us communicate with

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friends or customers, check the weather or the news, make purchases and donations to charity, read an electronic Bible, schedule an appointment on a calendar, or watch an instructional video on how to repair a broken item. My wife and I greatly enjoy using our smart phones for face-to-face live video chats with our children and grandchildren. A smart phone helps keep our family closer. I can't imagine why any Plain family wouldn't consider that a good thing, especially when their large families are scattered across many states.

Of course, a smart phone could be used to view pornography, or it could become addictive (as has been a problem for some teenagers), but that doesn't make smart phones inherently evil. Just like cars, smart phones are almost always used for constructive purposes. Why are Plain leaders so fearful that their flocks—who are supposed to be lovers of God and followers of Christ—will use them for evil? Millions of non-Plain people own smart phones that they never use for evil.

We all know that Jesus told His followers to “cut off” anything that causes them to stumble into sin (Matt. 5:29–30). If a Christian's phone causes him to stumble into sin or becomes too great a distraction, he should get rid of his phone. But there is no scriptural basis for Christian leaders to forbid their flocks from owning and using modern technologies that most believers will use in God-honoring ways.

There is, of course, room for prudent parental restrictions. Just as young people cannot legally use guns or drive automobiles until reaching a certain age, there are similar good reasons to prohibit them from using other technologies that could potentially harm them and others. Wise parents will be careful about letting their children use smart phones independently until they are confident that the children will use them only for good.

When my wife and I were raising our children, we did not have a TV in our home, because we recognized its potential for evil influence. We were not Plain, and we had no *ordnung*. We just wanted to raise our children in a godly environment. All of them grew up to become committed, Christian adults. My wife and I do own a TV now, but we only view what we consider educational or God-glorifying. We don't view what is ungodly. We do all this based on biblically grounded spiritual discernment, not an *ordnung*.

### **What about Entertainment?**

Weaver and Zimmerman also decry entertainment available through modern technology. Recall their early statement in chapter 1 of *Why Be Plain?*:

With all the wonders of modern technology beckoning with its lure of an easy, comfortable and *entertaining* lifestyle, fewer people want to shun what the world has to offer and live the Old Order and Scriptural lifestyle of nonconformity (p. 3, emphasis mine).

## *The Lure of the World, Part 2*

Granted, much of the entertainment available on cable television and the internet is evil and worldly, as it promotes the world's rebellion against God and His commandments. On the other hand, there is also wholesome, helpful, and Christian content available on the internet. Lots of it.

When I was born again, my inward nature changed, and I no longer enjoyed anything that was contrary to God's will, including ungodly entertainment. That was a great blessing. God changes the inward desires of those who are regenerated through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He also breaks the power of sin that once held them captive (see Rom. 6:1-7). For the first time in their lives, "His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). Jesus' yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matt. 11:30). As free moral agents, born-again believers are still capable of sin, but obedience, which formerly seemed impossible, is now very possible.

If religious leaders feel they must prohibit technology that has the potential to convey entertainment that is sinful, when in fact millions of non-Plain, born-again Christian believers use that same technology only for good, perhaps they are admitting that the people whom they are restricting are not born again.

Moreover, restricting non-born-again people from owning cell phones does not prevent them from secretly owning them, as any honest Plain leader will admit. In fact, prohibiting them only makes them even more desirable to those who are unregenerate.

Finally, there is nothing inherently evil about entertainment. In fact, God has provided many means of pleasurable entertainment, none of which are evil.

It is entertaining and pleasurable, for example, to watch children playing, flowers in bloom, autumn leaves changing colors, and glorious sunsets. It is entertaining to fish and hunt, hike in beautiful places, sew quilts, engage in wholesome conversation, and play croquet and volleyball. It is entertaining and pleasurable to make love with your spouse or to enjoy good food. And it is entertaining to view a clean, redemptive movie, to look at photos of beautiful places in the world, or to listen to uplifting, God-glorifying music. The apostle Paul wrote that God "richly supplies us with all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). Like all good fathers, our Heavenly Father loves His children, and He takes pleasure in our enjoyment of all He has graciously given us. Praise God!

Recently, my wife and I attended the Sight and Sound Theater in Lancaster, Pennsylvania to watch their production, *Daniel*. It was very inspiring, biblical and also entertaining. I would recommend it to anyone. Directly behind us sat an Amish couple with their two children. I was quite surprised. They told me it was their first time at the theater, even though they lived only a short distance away. I didn't have the nerve to ask them if what they were doing

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was against the ordnung, but I was encouraged by their recognition that some forms of entertainment can be spiritually edifying.

### **Forbidding Food to Prevent Gluttony?**

Contained within Dan and Steve's fictional conversation in the first chapter of *Why Be Plain?* is this complaint by Dan:

Almost everything that our church forbids is in no way sin. Just because it could be used wrong surely doesn't make it wrong to own. The thing is, almost everything in the world that is good can also be used for evil. Should we forbid food because of gluttony? It seems to me our church comes close to making rules as ridiculous as that (p. 2).

Weaver and Zimmerman subsequently address Dan's complaint:

As for Dan's statement that some church guidelines are like forbidding food because of gluttony, it must be pointed out that there is a big difference. For one, food is essential for life. The world's gadgets usually are not. Two, God Himself made food for the stomach and the stomach for food, calling both "good." God has not made modern technology—man has. God has not called the high things of the world good, but rather, "abomination" (Luke 16:15) (p. 9).

The authors employ the same scripture two paragraphs later:

This deception is not only found among the youth, but also among discontented church members who are subconsciously trying to attain the forbidden while hiding behind a cloak of "Scriptural" reasons. "*Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God*" (Luke 16:15) (p. 10, emphasis in original).

Dan's analogy of forbidding food to prevent gluttony, like all analogies, is imperfect but still appropriate. If you ask any Plain leader why owning or driving an automobile is wrong, they will likely say either that they don't know or that the prohibition prevents potential sin. "Driving a car can lead to other things," they might say. But what sins are they trying to prevent? The robbing of banks? All Plain people regularly employ "English"<sup>6</sup> automobile drivers, and those English drivers will take them anywhere that their English consciences allow. So do Plain people need English people to help them avoid sinning?

In any case, Weaver and Zimmerman state that, unlike food, "God has not

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<sup>6</sup> For non-Plain readers: Plain people refer to all non-Plain people as "English" because they speak English. In the Plain worldview, there are only two categories of people, Plain and English.

## *The Lure of the World, Part 2*

made modern technology—man has.” They add that, unlike food, God never declared “the high things of the world good, but rather, [an] abomination (Luke 16:15).”

Clearly, the authors view modern technology as one of “the high things of the world” that Jesus condemned in Luke 16:15. Thus, it is an abomination in God’s eyes. Let’s consider the validity of that conclusion.

First, since there was no modern technology when Jesus walked the earth, He obviously wasn’t condemning modern technology when He spoke to His ancient followers as recorded in Luke 16:15. He must have been condemning something else that was “highly esteemed among men” in His own time.

Second, the authors’ conclusion begs the question of why Plain people have embraced 95% of all modern technologies. Why aren’t all those things among the “high things of the world” that Jesus allegedly condemned?

Third, on what logical grounds can the authors declare that certain modern technologies, such as automobiles, could be or are among the “high things of the world”? There are hundreds of millions of automobiles on roads around the world. In North America, vehicles are more common than houses. If cars are an abomination to God, why are Plain people frequently paying to be transported in cars? That does not seem consistent. The money they give to English taxi drivers would be promoting the sin of those drivers as they continue to own and drive what allegedly is an abomination in God’s eyes.

If we simply read the passage in context, we can see exactly what Jesus was condemning. He was warning about the love of money, something that existed in His day—long before modern technology—and that continues to exist in all cultures around the world. Let’s read Jesus’ words in context:

“No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” Now the Pharisees, who were *lovers of money*, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him. And He said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for *that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God*” (Luke 16:13–14, emphasis added).

The twelve verses that precede the two I just quoted make it even more obvious that Jesus was warning about the love of money. Money is the primary competitor with God for people’s hearts, as Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (Matt. 6:24).

Money is the master of those who love it, because money, not God, controls

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their lives. The Pharisees were lovers of money, which is why they scoffed when Jesus taught His followers about faithful stewardship.

### **What Does the World “Highly Esteem”?**

Long before there was any modern technology, the world highly esteemed wealth and wealthy people. Worldly people gawk at the rich, wishing they could live a similar lifestyle. God, however, considers such a lifestyle an abomination, for at least two reasons.

First, many (not all) wealthy people—today, during Jesus’ time, and throughout human history—gain their wealth by breaking God’s commandments. They have not treated others how they would want to be treated, or they have sinned in other ways to get rich.

Second, many wealthy people—today, during Jesus’ time, and throughout human history—ignore the cry of the poor whom they could easily help if they cared. They are like the rich man at whose gate Lazarus was laid. And they will share a similar fate as that rich man if they don’t repent. (Incidentally, the rich young ruler who asked Jesus what he must do to obtain eternal life likely gained his wealth righteously. Jesus, however, told him he still needed to care for the poor.)

The love of money, also called greed, is manifested in two ways: (1) breaking any of God’s commandments to obtain money, and (2) breaking any of God’s commandments regarding how money is used once it is obtained.

Job gained his wealth without breaking any of God’s commandments, and he faithfully stewarded what God entrusted to him by fairly employing many workers as well as by caring for widows, orphans, and the disabled. I know quite a few wealthy people who are like that.

In any case, to use Luke 16:15 to condemn hard-working Plain people who have decided to use their money—which they’ve previously been spending on horses, harnesses, horse feed, buggies and English taxi drivers—to purchase a car is a complete distortion of its message. My friend Jonas Kurtz, a former Amish minister, previously employed—for his concrete business—an English taxi driver five days a week, paying him about \$50,000 per year to drive a truck owned by Jonas (as was permitted in his Amish community’s ordnung). If, instead of employing a chauffeur (as only very wealthy people do), Jonas had driven himself, he could have saved himself \$50,000 a year, and he could have given some of his savings to the poor! Now, as a born-again follower of Jesus, Jonas is living less like the wealthy people of the world who employ chauffeurs, because he drives his own used vehicle!

It is not worldly to own and drive a car. It would seem more worldly to spend large amounts of money on a chauffeur when that would not be necessary.

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### **The Twisting of Scripture**

Weaver and Zimmerman certainly know better than to twist Luke 16:15 to condemn car ownership and driving. They admonish their readers, "The Bible should not be read for justification but for truth" (p. 9). That, however, is exactly what the authors have done with Luke 16:15. Worse, after finding a solitary scripture to justify their tradition that car ownership is an abomination to God, they exalt their tradition to the level of God's commandments, excommunicating and shunning anyone from their ranks who buys a car, and telling them they will go to hell for it.

The authors also write:

When we hear criticism against the Plain Churches, the question to ask is not, what does this or that book or person say, but rather, "What does the Bible say on this topic?" The Bible is its own best commentary, often explaining itself in another verse. If a belief cannot be proven by more than one verse correctly taken in context and not contradicted by another verse, then it is very dangerous to build on it (p. 11).

I could not agree more. Why then have authors ignored the context of Luke 16:15, which so plainly reveals exactly what Jesus was condemning? And where are all the other scriptures that support their idea that modern technology, like automobiles, is an abomination to God?

### **Nonconformity?**

In the previously-quoted passage in which Weaver and Zimmerman warn about the "lure of an easy, comfortable and entertaining lifestyle," they claim that the Old Order lifestyle, in contrast, is a "Scriptural lifestyle of nonconformity."

But is the Old Order lifestyle scriptural?

There is nothing in the New Testament that remotely resembles the ordnungs of Plain communities, which consist of hundreds of extra-biblical rules. Nothing in the New Testament remotely resembles the vows that Plain young people are expected to make to Plain churches and their ordnungs. And nothing in the New Testament remotely resembles the excommunication and shunning of people if they don't keep hundreds of man-made rules contained in ordnungs. In short, the Plain lifestyle is not justified by Scripture.

Second, is the Plain lifestyle one of nonconformity?

We have seen that Christians are not to "be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds" (Rom. 12:2). But as we have also seen, Christian nonconformity is expressed by obedience to the commandments of Christ, in contrast to the sin and disobedience that characterize the world.

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The irony of the authors' claim is that Plain life is *all about conformity*—to the hundreds of man-made rules of each community's *ordnung*. If you don't conform, you will lose your family, friends and livelihood. Therefore, everyone conforms due to fear.

Some Amish people have written to ask me if I practice “nonconformity of dress,” as if that is a biblical idea. It isn't. Jesus and His apostles dressed like everyone else in their culture. So did the early Christians. So did the original Anabaptists in the 16th century. And for the most part, so did Amish folks until sometime in the late 1800s or early 1900s.

Did you think that during their 330-year history, Amish people have *always* worn distinctive clothing that identified them as Amish? Or did Amish people, at some point in their 330-year history, decide to adopt an entirely new dress code for men, women, and children that then made them stand out from everyone else in North America? Obviously, the Plain idea of “nonconformity of dress” was slowly adopted to resist slowly changing styles. For most of Amish history, Amish people have dressed just like “the world.”

Clothing styles have changed throughout human history. For a few decades in the early 20th century, “coal shuttle” bonnets were the fashion rage. Modern Amish women have preserved the world's fashion from that era with their black “tunnel” bonnets that they wear when in public. They are dressing just as “the world” did in the early 1900s (or at least at some point in history). Below is a photo of Amanda Hazlett feeding her chickens, taken in the early 1900s, just 50 feet from the home where I am sitting as I write these words. Amanda was not Amish. Take a look at her bonnet.



## *The Lure of the World, Part 2*

The 1632 Dordrecht Confession contains nothing about nonconformity of dress.<sup>7</sup> That is because the early Anabaptists had no extra-biblical rules regarding dress, or regarding anything else for that matter.

Ironically, the only nonconformists within the Plain community are the ones who don't conform in some way to the ordnung and who are subsequently excommunicated and shunned. Some of those nonconforming, excommunicated Plain folks then conform to the world in the biblical sense. That is, they embrace a lifestyle of disobedience to Christ. Others, however, do not conform to the world in a biblical sense, because they adopt a lifestyle of obedience to Christ, even though they no longer keep the peculiar requirements of their former community's man-made ordnung. I know many of those kinds of formerly Plain people.

Tragically, many Christ-following former Plain people are judged and condemned by their own Plain family members as having "gone to the world" to "travel on the road to hell." Won't those family members be surprised to discover in heaven (if they make it there themselves) those whom they condemned, excommunicated, and shunned?

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<sup>7</sup> The New Testament does teach that women should "adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness" (1 Tim. 2:9). We'll consider that passage in more detail later in this book. But Paul wrote nothing about Christians wearing uniforms that make them stand out among others.



# Chapter 4

## The Lure of the World, Part 3

WBP? Chapter 1, pages 4-8

The authors of *Why Be Plain?* tackle in their first chapter, among other things, a question that probably every Plain person has pondered: *Is keeping the ordnung really required to gain entrance into heaven—as is consistently claimed by Plain leaders?* The answer must be yes or no. In their fictitious conversation at the beginning of chapter 1, Dan and Steve conclude that the answer is no. Therefore, they decide, there is no reason not to own a car or smart phone.

Of course, if keeping the ordnung is required to gain entrance into heaven, that means non-Plain people—most of whom have never even heard of Plain ordnungs or anything resembling them, and who comprise 99.995% of the world’s population—have no chance of inheriting eternal life. Such a fact causes thoughtful Plain people to wonder if God could be so unfair as to not give the large majority of all the people currently living on Earth *any* chance of being saved in the end.

Those same Plain people also start wondering about all the people who have lived on the earth over the past 2,000 years without knowing about Plain ordnungs. Were all those people destined to go to hell?

When Plain people ask these questions, their ministers and bishops can answer in one of two ways. They can say (1) that keeping the ordnung is *not*

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required to gain entrance to heaven, but that would contradict what they have always told their Old Order flocks. Or they can say (2) that God has two standards, one for people who are born Plain and another for everyone else. Of course, Plain leaders always choose the latter of those two answers, and that is exactly what Weaver and Zimmerman do.

### **Similar Hard Questions**

But what about the fact that there are so many variations of the ordnung among Plain communities? And what about other Anabaptist groups whose ordnungs are generally more liberal than Old Order ordnungs? How can there be different requirements for different Anabaptist groups to gain entrance into heaven? Weaver and Zimmerman try to tackle those questions as well, making it clear that they believe other similar “conservative” and “nonconforming” groups also have a chance at gaining heaven. They start by defining what it means to be “Plain”:

“Plain” is a rather broad term and calls for definition. In this book it will refer to Old Order, conservative-minded churches based on the Bible and the Dordrecht Eighteen Articles of Faith. (Although the focus of this book is doctrines held by Old Order groups, it is not that the authors believe those are the only churches who practice Scriptural conservatism and nonconformity. Hopefully all conservative-minded churches can find encouragement herein, even if they are not Old Order.) (p. 4)

What do the authors mean by “conservative” and “nonconforming?” Their very next sentence points to the answer: “It must be added that not every Old Order horse and buggy group fits into the above definition of Plain.” They then explain that a few Old Order groups allow a certain degree of immorality, even though they drive horses and buggies.

So “conservative” has no association with being politically conservative but refers to conserving the practices of past Plain generations. “Conservative” and “nonconforming” groups are “horse and buggy” groups that do not allow the driving of cars. That would include, for example, Old Order Amish, New Order Amish (who are permitted to own cars but not to drive them) and the most conservative among the Mennonites, known as “horse and buggy Mennonites.”

Although the authors don’t say it directly, they certainly imply that other “Plain” folks, whose ordnungs are less restrictive, also have a chance of gaining heaven. But they don’t explain how that could be fair. And if that is true, it would seem wise for all conservative Anabaptist people to join the least restrictive groups, as that would give them the best chance of getting into heaven (since they would have less risk of violating the rules).

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### **What about “Progressive” Churches?**

But what about non-Plain Christian groups? The authors address that question as well, and they make it clear that people in “progressive churches” also have a chance at eternal life. The reason is that, because they have never been taught the principles of “separation from the world” and “nonconformity,” God holds them to a lesser standard. To prove their point, the authors cite two passages indicating that God holds people accountable for their sins only to the degree that they understand His will:

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin (John 15:22).

And that slave who knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more (Luke 12:47–48).

In both of those passages, however, Jesus was teaching about knowledge of God’s will as He has revealed it through *His commandments*. Jesus was not talking about the knowledge of man-made ordnung rules that God has never given. In any case, Weaver and Zimmerman conclude:

Since many members of progressive churches have never been taught the necessity of separation from the world [that is, not driving cars or owning smart phones, following a community dress code, and so on], some of them may be following Jesus the best they know how. With knowledge of the truth comes the responsibility to obey. The Plain Churches have a greater responsibility to be separated from the world because they recognize the Biblical principles of nonconformity (p. 7).

This explanation is fraught with fallacies, the greatest of which is mixing of man-made ordnung rules with God’s commandments and making them equal. If the explanation was *honestly* stated, it would read something like this:

Since many members of progressive churches have never been taught all the man-made rules and traditions contained in Old Order ordnungs, some of them may be following Jesus by simply obeying His commandments. But with the knowledge that the rules of man-made Plain ordnungs are equal to the commandments of God comes the responsibility to obey those man-made rules. The Plain churches have a greater responsibility to keep the hundreds of ordnung rules that govern every detail of their lives, because they recognize that the Bible’s admonitions not to be conformed to the world are fulfilled by keeping the man-made rules of Old Order ordnungs.

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In any case, Weaver and Zimmerman believe that God has a lower standard for non-Plain people because of their ignorance. Had any Plain person *not* been born Plain but had instead been born into the 99.995% of the world that is not Plain, he would have been born under a lower standard, and it would be easier for him to gain eternal life. (That would seem to indicate that being born Plain is a curse, because it is more difficult for Plain people than any other people on the planet to gain entrance into heaven.)

Even if we consider only the portion of the world's people who are born again (thought by some to be around 11%, or 880 million people), Weaver and Zimmerman believe that God has a lower standard for 99.95% of those Christians. Although most of them regularly read and study their Bibles throughout their Christian lives, as well as listening to hundreds of sermons based on the Bible, they are somehow ignorant of the "Biblical principles of nonconformity" that only Plain people have discovered. Does anything seem odd about that claim? Or boastful?

### **The Plain Fear of Damnation**

Weaver and Zimmerman next explain what they have been leading up to—the fate of Plain people who do not keep the ordnung:

This is one reason why it is so questionable for someone from an Old Order setting to join a liberal church; he knows the Biblical teaching against worldliness and *will be judged accordingly!* (p. 7, emphasis mine).

That sentence is a veiled reference to the eternal damnation to which every Plain person who leaves the Old Order for any "liberal" church is exposed. Plain people know the consequences of violating their community's ordnung. If they don't publicly repent, they will be excommunicated and shunned until they do publicly repent. If they never publicly repent, they will never be welcomed back into fellowship and will suffer being shunned to some degree, depending on the community. And they will be told that they are hell-bound, having broken the vows of their youth and their twice-annual pledge to uphold the ordnung.

Weaver and Zimmerman's message to Dan and Steve and all offspring of Plain parents whom they represent is loud and clear: *If you don't join the church and follow the ordnung—which, among other things, means never driving a car—you will go to hell. God planted you among the Plain people, and so He expects you to always be Plain and keep Old Order rules. God will judge you by the standards of the ordnung!* Clearly, the authors elevate the ordnung to the same level as God's commandments. That is very troubling to anyone who believes the Bible.

But once again, the authors promise leniency for those not born Plain:

The true follower of Christ is not the one who has all the i's dotted and t's crossed in Bible commandments. Rather, it's everyone *who does the best*

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*he can with what he understands, and places his faith in Christ. ... A person dressed in fancy apparel and one dressed plainly—if they are obeying what they understand, they will find grace by God. ...*

So when we point out areas in the more liberal churches that are not Scriptural, understand we are doing only that. We are not judging the members of those churches.

All churches have their strong and weak points, and that includes the Plain People. But one thing is sure; everyone who follows Jesus Christ and believes in Him will be saved, regardless of what congregation they are with. There will be people in Heaven, a great multitude without number, from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Rev. 7:9–10). ... If we believe in Jesus and seek to do His will to the best of our understanding, we can be part of that multitude (p. 8, emphasis mine).

First, once again, the authors mix God’s commandments with Plain ordnungs. But this time, God’s commandments are *downplayed* in importance compared to the ordnung. The authors say that the true follower of Christ “is not the one who has all the i’s dotted and t’s crossed in Bible *commandments*.” However, those who know the ordnung’s dress code had better obey it!

Second, even though God expects Old Order people to obey the ordnung’s dress code, He has no such expectation of non-Plain people, because they don’t know what He requires, as it is revealed in the Plain ordnung. Again, God has a higher standard for Old Order people. Heaven is more difficult to attain for them. There are things that non-Plain people can do and still get into heaven, whereas Plain people who do those same things will be cast into hell.

Third, the authors admit that the large majority of people in heaven will never have kept anything that resembles a Plain ordnung, because heaven will be filled with “a great multitude without number, from every nation, tribe, people, and language” (Rev. 7:9), and we know that nearly all Plain people today live in North America. Yet the authors maintain that among that great multitude, only Plain people will have been required to keep an ordnung in order to qualify as part of that multitude. Does that make sense? *And how did the large majority of Christians in that great multitude miss the Bible’s message of “separation from the world” that only Plain people saw?*

Furthermore, the authors contradict themselves in the third paragraph quoted above. There they write, “Everyone who follows Jesus Christ and believes in Him will be saved.” What they mean, of course (according to what they have previously written), is that everyone who follows Jesus Christ and believes in Him will be saved—with the exception of those who are born Plain, because God has created many additional requirements for them beyond believing in Jesus and following Him. They must also keep hundreds of man-made rules.

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In summary, Weaver and Zimmerman portray God as having two standards, one for Plain people and another for everyone else. They claim that He expects more from Plain people than from non-Plain people and will judge both groups accordingly. Non-Plain people can get into heaven even if they don't keep a Plain ordnung, because "everyone who follows Jesus Christ and believes in Him will be saved." Yet, in contradiction to that promise, Plain people must also keep the ordnung. All this has no scriptural support. It is simply a vain attempt to justify Plain tradition.

# Chapter 5

## The Lure of the World, Part 4

WBP? Chapter 1, page 12

In their quest to convince discontented Plain folks not to defect from Plain ranks, Weaver and Zimmerman appeal at the close of their first chapter to the New Testament's admonitions for Christians to submit to spiritual leaders. They write:

We live in an individualistic society. It's all about me, my beliefs, my opinions, my rights. This attitude wants to in-filter into the church and we are in danger of losing the Anabaptist way of submission to God, the brotherhood, and ordained ministerial authority. ... In the Anabaptist way, group authority guides personal conviction. The Holy Spirit would not give a person one conviction and his brother the opposite one.

The very commandments in the Bible to submit to the brotherhood and the ministry implies that opinions will differ but may not override church authority. Paul admonished the church in Rome not to quarrel over opinions and differences.

It is another matter when a church is willfully disobeying the Bible. But too often people leave because they have a different way of interpreting a confusing verse, not because Bible doctrines have actually been dropped (p. 12).

All this is generally true. The Bible has plenty to say about believers' obligation to submit to God, secular government, employers, church leadership,

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and one another (Jas. 4:7; Rom. 13:1–7; Tit. 2:9; Heb. 13:17; Eph. 5:21). Of those five, however, there is only one to which Christians are *always* supposed to submit—God. The other four are composed of human leaders who themselves may not be submitted to God.

Scripture makes it clear that there are times when Christians should *not* submit to secular government, employers, church leadership, or other Christians. When any other authority stands at odds with what God expects of us, we are obligated—due to our higher obligation to always submit to God—not to submit to them. That means we are obligated to *disobey* them. It is just that simple.

That is certainly what the original Anabaptists believed. Many of them forfeited their lives because their dedication to God motivated them not to submit to civil and religious authorities. You can read their inspiring stories in *The Martyr's Mirror*.

The original apostles once similarly suffered flogging by civil and religious authorities for preaching the gospel. But after being flogged and warned, they kept right on proclaiming the good news (see Acts 5:40–42). They did not submit. Peter and the apostles declared, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

Peter and John’s similar Spirit-inspired response to the Jewish Sanhedrin, who commanded them to no longer teach about Jesus, instructs all of us about our own call to God-honoring civil disobedience:

Whether it is right in the sight of God *to give heed to you rather than to God*, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard (Acts 4:19–20, emphasis added).

### **Church Authorities**

Although we generally expect church authorities to be worthy of our trust, Jesus warned His followers about “false prophets” who are “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (Matt. 7:15). His analogy reminds us that such spiritual wolves could be *right among the flock*. They appear to be harmless sheep but “inwardly are ravenous wolves.” They aren’t servants of the sheep, but predators.

I think very few Plain leaders can be considered spiritual predators. Nevertheless, sincere leaders can be “the blind leading the blind,” to borrow another of Jesus’ descriptions of some spiritual leaders (see Matt. 15:14). Those who are misguided themselves are apt to mislead others.

Current Plain leaders, like all other sincere Plain folks, have been taught Plain doctrines from childhood, and Plain thinking is not easily challenged within Plain circles. Tradition runs very deep, questioning is discouraged, protective walls are tall, disagreement is dealt with by expulsion, and the Bible is

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often interpreted through Plain lenses. In fact, anyone who challenges Plain tradition or doctrine from the outside or inside is often referred to as a “wolf in sheep’s clothing.”

I am not seeking to criticize Plain leaders. If I had been raised Plain, I would likely think just like an average Plain person. I would interpret the Bible through a Plain lens. If I didn’t understand German and was discouraged from reading an English Bible, I would have a hard time comparing what I was taught with what the Bible teaches. But if my beliefs were indeed misguided, I would appreciate anyone who would love me enough to try to help me see what I was missing. I am trying, with love and humility, to be one such person, even though some view me as a wolf in sheep’s clothing.

In previous chapters, I have sought to show from the Bible that (1) the Plain interpretation of the phrase “the world” is generally unbiblical, (2) the Plain belief that God has a lower standard for English people to get into heaven and a higher standard for Plain people is also unbiblical, and (3) nothing in the New Testament resembles any Plain ordnung. If I succeeded in persuading you on these points, you now realize that your Plain bishops and ministers have been misleading you. They are probably entirely sincere, but they are still misleading you on some very important issues. The biggest of these issues is the idea that you must keep hundreds of rules that can’t be found in the Bible if you want to enter heaven. They are making man-made rules equal with God’s commandments.

Therefore, when spiritual leaders who mislead you by means of unbiblical ideas about what is required to get into heaven then say you must submit to them because the Bible requires submission to church leaders, you are under no obligation to submit to them. In fact, if you know the biblical truth, you are responsible to gently, lovingly *confront* those spiritual leaders—for their own sakes and for the sake of those whom they are misleading. *To submit to such spiritual leaders would be to disobey God.* When such spiritual leaders expect you to submit to them, it is like a blind person expecting a seeing person to follow him. No seeing person would allow a blind person to lead him. The only people who would allow a blind person to lead them are other blind people. And no seeing person would remain silent if he saw a blind person leading anyone!

### **What Does the 1632 Dordrecht Confession Say?**

Again, I want to emphasize my sympathy and respect for all Plain leaders and all Plain people. They have all been born into a unique culture and religious system. There are many praiseworthy aspects of Plain culture, passed down from the original Anabaptists who loved Jesus. And there are many sincere, wonderful Plain people.

But their current religious system is not like that of the original Anabaptists.

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The centerpiece of the faith of the original Anabaptists was the new birth and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. They had no ordnung but the commandments of Christ, which is why you won't find anything about any ordnung in the 1632 Dordrecht Confession. Since they had no ordnung, there is no record of them requiring ordnung vows of baptismal candidates or semi-annual ordnung vow renewals of everyone. Nor is there any record of them shunning anyone who transgressed the ordnung. Beyond that, there is no record that they avoided using any man-made technology available to them or dressed any differently from anyone else in their European communities.

But here is the real shocker for modern Plain folks: Not only is there no mention of any ordnung in the Dordrecht Confession, but it actually contains a prohibition *against* any ordnung. Allow me to show this.

The title of Article 5 of the Dordrecht Confession is: "Of the Law of Christ, that is, the Holy Gospel or the New Testament." There are three phrases in this title: "the Law of Christ," "the Holy Gospel," and "the New Testament." The last two are alternate descriptions of the first one. In other words, Article 5 is all about the Law of Christ, which can also be referred to as "the Holy Gospel" or "the New Testament."

What is the Law of Christ? It is a biblical phrase found in 1 Corinthians 9:19–21 that clearly refers to all of Christ's commandments, just as the phrase "the Law of Moses" in the same passage refers to all the commandments God gave through Moses. The original Anabaptists focused heavily on the commandments enumerated in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, believing that they introduced higher standards.

So Article 5 is all about the believer's obligation to obey Christ's commandments. In quoting Article 5 below, I have noted, in brackets, every time the Law of Christ is referenced, either directly or indirectly, and I have used all bold capital letters to highlight Article 5's clear prohibition against creating any additional rules beyond Christ's commandments:

**Of the Law of Christ, that is, the Holy Gospel or the New Testament:** We also believe and confess that before His ascension He instituted His New Testament [the Law of Christ], and, since it [the Law of Christ] was to be and remain an eternal Testament, that He confirmed and sealed the same [the Law of Christ] with His precious blood, and gave and left it [the Law of Christ] to His disciples, yea, charged them so highly with it [the Law of Christ], that neither angel nor man may alter it [the Law of Christ], **NOR ADD TO IT** [the Law of Christ] nor take away from it [the Law of Christ]; and that He caused the same [the Law of Christ], as containing the whole counsel and will of His heavenly Father, as far as is necessary for salvation to be proclaimed in His name by His beloved apostles, messengers, and ministers—whom He called, chose, and sent into all the world for that

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purpose—among all peoples, nations, and tongues; and repentance and remission of sins to be preached and testified of; and that He accordingly has therein declared all men without distinction, who through faith, as obedient children, heed, follow, and practice what the same [the Law of Christ] contains, to be His children and lawful heirs; thus excluding no one from the precious inheritance of eternal salvation, except the unbelieving and disobedient [to the Law of Christ], the stiff-necked and obdurate, who despise it [the Law of Christ], and incur this through their own sins, thus making themselves unworthy of eternal life. (Jer. 31:31; Heb. 9:15–17; Matt. 26:28; Gal. 1:8; I Tim. 6:3; John 15:15; Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Rom. 8:17; Acts 13:46).

Unquestionably, the original Anabaptists believed that eternal salvation was granted to those who repent, believe, and then obey the Law of Christ. To them, that was all that was required. Nothing more. And they also firmly believed that no one should add anything to the Law of Christ, as we just read.

But that is *exactly* what has happened in Plain circles. Although the authors of *Why Be Plain?* often misleadingly refer to the ordnung as “guidelines,” the ordnung has actually been elevated in Plain circles to be equal with Christ’s commandments, because every Plain person is required to pledge, at his baptism, to keep all the rules of the ordnung, and unrepented transgressions against the ordnung are treated as sins that result in eternal damnation. The original Anabaptists would be horrified by such an idea or practice. It would remind them of all the additional man-made rules of the Roman Catholic Church that were tied to salvation, rules from which they had been delivered.

In any case, when ordnung-promoting Plain leaders claim that the 1632 Dordrecht Confession—contained in practically every copy of *The Martyrs’ Mirror*, a book found in many Plain homes—is the standard for their doctrine and practice, they are ignoring Article 5, because it condemns the addition of any rules to the Law of Christ.

### **The New Testament on Ordnungs**

As we have already seen, there is nothing that remotely resembles Old Order ordnungs in the New Testament. The apostles saw no need to add hundreds of rules to the Law of Christ.

Of course, Jesus and His apostles, who lived under the old covenant, followed the Law of Moses. They didn’t, however, follow any of the thousands of “fence laws” that were added to the Law of Moses by the scribes and Pharisees.

Moreover, Jesus condemned Jewish leaders whose traditions invalidated God’s commandments or who “taught as doctrines *the precepts of men*” (Matt. 15:1–9, emphasis added). He also condemned religious leaders who “tied up

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heavy burdens and laid them on men's shoulders" (Matt. 23:4)—an obvious reference to extra religious obligations not included in the Law of Moses. All that should be instructive to modern Plain leaders.

The early church at first consisted solely of Jewish believers, who continued to keep both the moral and ceremonial requirements of the Law of Moses, as those requirements were the fabric of their culture. Of course, those Jewish believers also began keeping any commandments contained within the Law of Christ that were not included in the Law of Moses, such as Jesus' commandment to make disciples of all the nations, teaching them to obey all His commandments (see Matt. 28:19–20).

Years later, when Gentiles, whose culture was pagan, began believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, some of the apostles gathered in Jerusalem to decide whether Gentile believers were obligated to keep rules that were included in the Law of Moses but not in the Law of Christ, such as circumcision (see Acts 15). They decided that the answer was no, and that essentially God was not requiring anything of the Gentiles beyond obeying the Law of Christ. Some of the Jewish-background apostles soon began to understand the same was true for them. One of them was Paul (see 1 Cor. 9:19–23).

That landmark event in early church history should also be instructive to modern spiritual leaders. The early church, when given an opportunity to add extra rules beyond Christ's commandments for Gentile believers to obey, decided not to do so, even though those extra rules were of divine origin. They understood that the Law of Christ was sufficient.

### **The Simplification of God's Laws**

In contrast to Plain leaders who add hundreds of rules to Christ's commandments, Jesus Himself once declared that everything in the Law of Moses and the Prophets can be summarized by two commandments:

One of them, a lawyer, asked Him [Jesus] a question, testing Him, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' *On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets*" (Matt. 22:36–40, emphasis added).

That is why I am always so amused when professing Christians ask me if I am keeping some morally-insignificant rule for which they think they've found a little support in Scripture. I usually tell them, "I'm still working on loving God with all my heart, soul and mind, and loving my neighbor as myself. Once I reach perfection regarding those two commandments, perhaps I can then strive for perfection in lesser things, like you." (I usually find that people who are focused on morally insignif-

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icant rules are not doing well at loving their neighbors as themselves.) Imitating Jesus (see 1 Cor. 11:1), the apostle Paul had no qualms also simplifying God's expectations by summarizing all of them into one sentence:

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for *he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law*. For this, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Rom. 13:8–9, emphasis added).

For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal. 5:14).

Clearly, Paul believed that by focusing on one commandment—the commandment Jesus referred to as the second-greatest—one would keep all the commandments. So we could evaluate every ordnung rule by that one commandment. Any ordnung rule that is not related to loving my neighbor as myself is exposed as irrelevant to God. For example, how is the prohibition regarding driving cars relevant to the commandment to love our neighbor? There is no obvious relevance (unless, of course, I drove poorly and struck a pedestrian). Under normal conditions, a car could help me love my neighbor better, such as by providing a ride to the hospital in an emergency, or to a grocery store to purchase needed food.

What do you suppose the apostle Paul would say to Christian leaders who create and enforce hundreds of extra-biblical rules that have no relevance to the great commandments to love God and neighbor, as well as no moral, ethical or biblical basis, and who warn their congregations that if they don't keep all these extra rules, they will go to hell? We really don't have to guess, do we?

As noted earlier in this chapter, Weaver and Zimmerman declare that believers have the right to leave any church that is "willfully disobeying the Bible" (p. 12). By that declaration, they have unwittingly described every ordnung-promoting church and given every Plain person in them a right to leave.

If the truth be told, Plain people have no more obligation to submit to their bishop when he says, "You must keep the rules of the ordnung," than they would if he were to tell them to murder the Millers. Again, I know that they are only parroting what they've been taught all their lives. If any of them have read this far, however, they no longer have any excuse.

### **Shall We Abandon the Ordnung?**

Just as the Mosaic Law was the fabric of Jewish culture, so the ordnung is the fabric of Plain culture. And just as God didn't require Jewish believers in the early church to abandon their cultural connections to the Mosaic Law,

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neither does God require Plain believers in Jesus to abandon their cultural connections to their Old Order ordnung.

That being said, God *did* expect Jewish believers to realize that their salvation was by His grace through a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (whose commandments they thus obeyed) and not due to keeping any aspect of the Law of Moses that is not found in the Law of Christ. He also expected them to view believing Gentiles as their spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ, even though those Gentiles did not keep *any* aspect of the Law of Moses that was not included in the Law of Christ.

Similarly, God expects Plain believers to realize that their salvation is by His grace through a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (whose commandments they thus obey), not because they keep any aspect of the Plain ordnung that is not included in the Law of Christ. He also expects them to view fellow Plain believers who follow only some or none of the ordnung rules as their spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ, and also to view non-Plain followers of Christ in the same way.

Plain leaders who want to follow the New Testament example of the apostles would announce the end of the ordnung as having any relevance to salvation, while affirming repentance, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and obedience to the Law of Christ.

If they did that, we could have Plain communities full of people who would be faithfully following Christ but who would happily tolerate others in their community who keep all, some, or none of their former ordnung (that is not part of the Law of Christ), either as a matter of personal conviction or cultural preference. Some would be driving buggies and others would be driving cars. And those with cars could be taxi drivers for those who were still driving buggies! Some would be wearing traditional, cultural Amish clothing, and some would not. Everyone would love each other and get along.

This would also result in the reconciliation of thousands of Plain families who are currently at odds with each other. If the idea that the ordnung is relevant to salvation was eliminated, the result would be one big, happy family. Sounds like heaven!

# Chapter 6

## The Doctrine of Plain, Part 1

WBP? Chapter 3, pages 45-53

As we explored in previous chapters, in Plain thinking, “worldliness” is characterized not only by what transgresses *biblical* standards of holiness (as they are understood in Plain circles), but also by what transgresses *man-made*, extra-biblical rules of the *ordnung*. This is again made clear in chapter 3 of *Why Be Plain?* There, Weaver and Zimmerman define worldliness as “conformity to the non-Christian society, as well as all evil in general—both in the heart and outside the heart” (p. 46).

There are two distinct elements in that definition: (1) conformity to non-Christian society, and (2) to all evil in general. That may sound okay, but why didn’t the authors simply define worldliness as conformity to evil? Why also mention “conformity to the non-Christian society”? The reason is because they are preparing to justify the *ordnung*—the hundreds of extra-biblical rules that legislate the unique aspects of Plain nonconformity.

Moreover, in their definition of worldliness, they list nonconformity to non-Christian society first, and shunning all evil in general second. That subtle emphasis upon the *ordnung* continues in their very next sentence: “It is good and necessary that the Plain People shun worldliness by separating themselves from the *lifestyle of society*” (p. 46, emphasis added).

Separation from the world is the essence of the Plain lifestyle. But in Plain minds, that separation is defined not only by the New Testament but also by the *ordnung*, which varies in every Plain community.

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Of course, all genuine, born-again followers of Christ around the world shun any aspect of non-Christian society that they perceive as evil, based on their understanding of Scripture. The large majority of them, however, don't live like Plain people, following hundreds of extra-biblical rules.<sup>8</sup> Rather, they do their best, with the help of the Spirit who indwells them, to follow Christ's commandments. And that is exactly what all followers of Christ have done from the beginning, including the early Anabaptists, as revealed by the 1632 Dordrecht Confession. Not only does that confession not mention ordnungs, but it actually prohibits them, as we saw in the previous chapter.

Weaver and Zimmerman rightly acknowledge that the basis of a Christian lifestyle is God's Word. However, their interpretation of God's Word differs from that of the majority of genuine, born-again believers, currently and historically. For example, the authors write:

Our separation must be in tune with the principles of God's Word, such as modesty, humility, minding not the high things, living like pilgrims, and becoming like Jesus (p. 47).

Note that authors don't list the two commandments that Jesus called the greatest—"loving God with all our hearts" and "loving our neighbor as ourselves." Nor do they highlight caring for the "least of these," a commandment Jesus connected with our eternal destiny (Matt. 25:31–46). Keeping those three commandments would certainly result in a separation from the world, because the world generally does not keep those commandments.

Weaver and Zimmerman, however, focus on Plain distinctives. And even though they list five of those distinctives using biblical language, those who are familiar with Plain doctrine recognize that much more is actually being communicated. For example, in the previous chapter, we explored the Plain understanding of "minding not the high things," which, according to Weaver and Zimmerman, includes not owning an automobile. All five "principles of God's Word" that the authors list have unique meanings to Plain people.

Like all genuine believers, I am persuaded that modesty, humility, not loving money, living like a stranger and pilgrim on earth, and becoming like Jesus are all important (among other things). But I don't need to join a Plain community to pursue those five things. In fact, my pursuit of becoming like Jesus compels me *not* to join a Plain community, because Jesus lived so differently, in so many ways, from how most Plain people live today. We will explore some of those differences later, but my overall point is that Jesus focused on obeying *God's* commandments and was critical of additional, man-made fence laws, particularly when they nullified God's commandments.

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<sup>8</sup> I have traveled in more than 50 of the world's nations and often engaged with Christians in those nations.

## *The Doctrine of Plain, Part 1*

### **Plain Defined**

Weaver and Zimmerman go on to define what it means to be Plain:

Plain basically means “not conformed to the world.” The world, with their love of riches, glamour, and fashion are the opposite of plain (p. 48).

Most Christians, if asked to list the three primary characteristics of “the world,” would not select the world’s love of riches, glamour and fashion. That sounds more like a description of a very narrow slice of “the world,” a slice that might include Hollywood celebrities. More broadly, the primary and universal trait of “the world” is its rebellion against God and His moral law. Here is one of Paul’s descriptions of that world:

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful (Rom. 1:28–31).

Love of glamour and fashion aren’t on that list. The “love of riches,” also mentioned as a characteristic of “the world” by Weaver and Zimmerman, could be considered equivalent to “greed” in Paul’s list. However, the Plain definition of “the love of riches” amounts to an arbitrary setting by an ordnung standard of what one can or cannot own, a standard that would have no relevance whatsoever to the first-century Christians to whom Paul wrote. Scripture’s definition of greed is different from the Plain definition, as we will see shortly.

In any case, Weaver and Zimmerman’s unique characterization of “the world” seems designed to justify the unique nonconformity of Plain people.

All genuine Christians acknowledge the New Testament’s admonitions not to be conformed to the world. But if asked how one should obey those admonitions, no one outside the Plain community would answer, “By driving buggies, only being passengers in automobiles, and wearing clothing and hair styles that were fashionable a hundred years ago.” Rather, they would say, “By obeying Jesus’ commandments, unlike the world that is in rebellion against God.”

If asked how their use of material possessions exhibits nonconformity with the world, they might say, “We don’t break any of God’s commandments to make money, and we use a portion of what we earn to serve the poor and spread the gospel. That practice is based on Paul’s warning that ‘the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil’ (1 Tim. 6:10) and Jesus’ instructions to lay up treasures in heaven rather than on earth (Matt. 6:19–21). We don’t waste

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money on clothing we don't need (see Jas. 5:2), and we dress modestly, particularly our women (see 1 Tim. 2:9)."

### **"The World" Existed Before There Was Any Modern Technology**

By way of reminder, "the world" to which Christians should not conform existed in the apostles' time, before modern technology existed. Peter wrote:

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of *the world* by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first (2 Pet. 2:20, emphasis added).

Obviously, "escaping the defilements of the world" was equivalent to deliverance from sin, or from breaking God's commandments. Peter indicated that some of the early believers who had been set free from the power of sin had tragically backslid to become sin's prisoners again.

Paul similarly wrote, "For Demas, having loved *this present world*, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica" (2 Tim. 4:10, emphasis added). Backsliding Demas obviously didn't yield to the temptation to purchase technology. He yielded to the "passing pleasures of sin" (Heb. 11:25) in which unbelievers indulge.

James wrote, "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by *the world*" (James 1:27, emphasis added). To be "stained by the world" is to be stained with sin, that is, disobedience to God's commandments, not disobedience to a man-made list of rules.

And John wrote, "For whatever is born of God overcomes *the world*; and this is the victory that has overcome *the world*—our faith" (1 John 5:4). John affirmed that everyone who has truly believed and is truly "born of God" (that is, born again) "overcomes the world." That is a biblical fact. So (read slowly here), either all non-Plain, born-again Christians are actually *not* born again (since they use modern technology and have therefore allegedly not "overcome the world"), or Plain people are mistaken in thinking that using modern technology is "worldly."

### **A Separate Christian Culture?**

Weaver and Zimmerman continue describing Plain nonconformity as follows:

The Plain People have formed a separated Christian culture in their communities. This is a good thing, because everyone is conformed to a culture. If Christians don't form their own culture, they will conform to the culture around them—a worldly one (p. 48).

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According to them, it can be only one or the other. If Christians don't form separate cultures as Plain people do, then they will be conformed to the world. There is nothing in between, even though hundreds of millions of Christ-followers, historically and currently, have not formed distinct cultures that resemble Plain cultures.

Historically, where is there an example in the New Testament of Christians forming separate cultures, like modern Plain people? The very first Christians—all Jewish—differed from nonbelievers in just one major way: they believed in Jesus and strove to obey His commandments. Other than that, they remained culturally identical to their Jewish neighbors, even keeping the Mosaic dietary laws (see Acts 10:9–13). But they were not “conformed to the world”; that is, they were not acting like unbelievers from a moral standpoint.

And when the Gentiles later began becoming believers, the same was true of them. They didn't start wearing outdated clothing or hair styles to stand out from their neighbors as “nonconforming” Christians. They dressed just as they had done before they became believers. Their nonconformity consisted of obeying Jesus.

With regard to hair styles and clothing, perhaps some people made adjustments. Maybe some wealthy converted women—who formerly spent hours braiding their hair in the very complex and elaborate styles that were popular in ancient Greek culture—began devoting less attention to the outer person and more to the inner person (see 1 Tim. 2:9–10; 1 Pet. 3:3–4). Such lifestyle changes by the wealthy were based on biblical, moral principles. But the Christians did not wear required uniforms.

This doesn't mean that Christian women were ashamed of their God-given attractiveness, or that they didn't try to please their husbands by their appearance. When Peter admonished Christian women to focus more on the inward person than on outward appearance, he cited Sarah as an example (see 1 Pet. 3:3–6). Sarah was so physically attractive—even though she doubtless dressed very modestly—that her husband feared other men might kill him in order to possess her (see Gen. 12:10–16).

### **When Paul Conformed to Cultures**

The whole idea of a “separated Christian culture” is unbiblical. In fact, the apostle Paul purposely conformed to the cultures in which he traveled (without transgressing any of Jesus' commandments) *in order not to hinder people within those cultures from listening to and believing his gospel*:

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the [Mosaic] Law, as under the Law though

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not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law [Gentiles], as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it (1 Cor. 9:19–23).

When Paul interacted with Jews, he conformed to Jewish culture. When he interacted with Gentiles, he conformed to Gentile culture. That is, he did not act like a Jew under the Mosaic Law, as he knew that would send the wrong message to them.

We will explore this issue in greater detail in a later chapter, but Plain culture is a potential hindrance to the gospel's progress, as it sends this message to unbelievers: "If you want to go to heaven, you must embrace and adopt our peculiar culture, one that is characterized by conformity to many rules that have no apparent connection to morality, ethics or the Bible."

Tragically, many Plain people seem not to understand the gospel themselves, so they have no message to proclaim to others or motivation to do so. Moreover, those among the Plain who do know the gospel rarely share it with anyone else. If they did, the ordnung they follow would be communicating a call to conformity to it, and born-again Plain people know that. In fact, even if *genuinely* born-again Plain people shared the gospel with *unregenerate* Plain people who followed a different ordnung, they would still be ineffective, because their unregenerate Plain audiences would assume that to be born again, they would have to embrace the identical ordnung as the gospel preachers.

In any case, if there is such a thing as biblical "Christian culture," it is the one exemplified by the early Christians as well as the early Anabaptists. What set them apart from the world's culture was their love for God and neighbor, not hundreds of detailed rules that governed every aspect of their lives and were enforced by threat of excommunication and shunning. That fact is undeniable.

### **What It Means to Love the World**

In support of their view, Weaver and Zimmerman quote 1 John 2:15–17, a passage we considered in a previous chapter. There John warned:

Do not love the world nor the things *in the world*. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is *in the world*, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world (emphasis added).

Without any scriptural support, Weaver and Zimmerman define "the things

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in the world” as “*possessions* that lead to temptation and away from the love of God” (emphasis mine). And they likewise define “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life” as subsets of the same, again without any biblical evidence for their claims. They pull their definitions out of thin air. For example, they define “lust of the flesh” as

any covetousness or desire for *what we do not or should not have*. It could refer to lusting after unnecessary *luxuries* offered by the world. ... Might another example be lusting after something church guidelines do not allow? (p. 52, emphasis added).

That is an invented definition of “the lust of the flesh” that is clearly designed to fit Plain ordnungs. By that vague and slipshod definition, no Christian should desire any material thing that they don’t already have. In that case, I suppose we shouldn’t buy any type of food that’s not already in our home!

The authors then describe the “lust of the eyes” as follows:

When we look at the world and desire their entertainment, splendor, and *possessions*, we are lusting with our eyes. *Fancy design and ornaments* are only for pleasing the desires of the eye. And what are the world’s eyes drawn to more than “screens”? Through lusting after the evils of the world with our eyes—something made very easy by the smart phone—the world enters our hearts and chokes out the love for God (p. 53, emphasis added).

That is another invented definition, pulled from thin air, that is clearly designed to fit Plain ordnungs.

Finally, they say that “the pride of life”

is often centered around *riches, flashy apparel, fancy cars, possessions, status and position*. Everything *we have* or do simply to be admired by others is done for the pride of life (p. 53; emphasis added).

In the four definitions quoted above, I italicized every time material possessions were mentioned. Notice all the italics! They reveal one major problem with all those definitions. The apostle John penned his words in the first century, when there was no modern technology and most Christians were quite poor, especially by modern Western standards. Many were servants or slaves. What John was warning about must have had application to those people, and as the inspired Word of God, it must be relevant to every culture since then until today, *not just to 21st-century American culture*.

And it did. As we saw previously, the “lust of the flesh” consists of the universal and age-old sinful desires that result in “immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing” and so on (Gal. 5:19–21).

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I also briefly explained “the lust of eyes” as likely being biblical greed, which is a transgression of any of God’s commandments regarding the acquisition or use of money or possessions. Poor people can commit the sin of greed. Biblical greed is not defined by an arbitrary, man-made standard of what or how much one earns or owns.

As for the “boastful pride of life,” that is the universal pride held in common by all unregenerate people who see no need to humble themselves in repentance and submission to God (see Prov. 8:13; Is. 2:11–17; 13:11; Luke 18:9–14).

Weaver and Zimmerman have defined biblical phrases based on their own cultural biases. This is unfortunate since, as they write, “The Bible should not be read for justification but for truth” (p. 9).

### **A Closer Look at Biblical Greed**

*Any* material possessions, whether those available in the first century or today, can tempt us not to love our neighbors as ourselves and thus to sin against God. That is the greed against which Scripture warns. We could be tempted, for example, to gain some material thing, regardless of its value, by theft or deception. Poor people can be guilty of that form of greed. Or we could be tempted not to share with those in need. As John warned his readers, “But whoever has *the world’s goods*, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?” (1 John 3:17).

Obviously, back in John’s time, long before modern technology, there were material possessions that John described as “the world’s goods.” Moreover, he said that some Christians possessed the world’s goods! He referred to them in that way not because only nonbelievers possessed them but because the world is focused on them. For nonbelievers, material things are all they possess (as Jesus said in Matthew 6:32). They don’t have what is most valuable—a relationship with God.

Again, John did not intimate that there was anything wrong with possessing “the world’s goods”—unless those who possessed them failed to share them with fellow Christians in need. Had those who possessed “the world’s goods” not owned anything, they would have had nothing to share! Therefore, it is obvious that these goods are not inherently evil. In fact, they were potentially good, as they could be shared to relieve those in need.

Additionally, “the world’s goods” were not necessarily luxury items. They could have been extra food or clothing that one might possess. As John the Baptist told his audience, “The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none; and he who has food is to do likewise” (Luke 3:11). Those who followed John’s instruction shared “the world’s goods” with those in need.

All this discussion further exposes Weaver and Zimmerman’s narrow and

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deficient definition of “the things in the world” by reducing them to “possessions that lead to temptation and away from the love of God,” which most ordnungs *arbitrarily* and *variously* define. For Plain people, only *some* possessions are labeled as “the things in the world.”

John explained clearly what “things in the world” he was warning about: “For all that is *in the world*, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” (1 John 2:15–17). He was not warning about specific material things at all. Rather, he was warning about wrong desires and attitudes (“lust” and “pride”) that have always characterized the unregenerate world.

### **Plain Wealth**

In comparison to most people around the world, the large majority of Plain people are very wealthy, like most North Americans. We all have much more than we need according to the biblical definition, which limits our actual needs to food, drink, clothing, and shelter.

Paul wrote to Timothy, “For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have *food* and *covering*, with these we shall be content” (1 Tim. 6:7–8, emphasis added).

Jesus, after admonishing His followers not to be concerned about what they would eat, drink or wear (Matt. 6:25–31), told them their heavenly Father knew that they needed all those things (Matt. 6:32b).

As I mentioned earlier, John the Baptist said, “The man who has *two tunics* is to share with him who has none; and he who has *food* is to do likewise” (Luke 3:11, emphasis added).

James wrote, “If a brother or sister is without *clothing* and in need of *daily food*, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them *what is necessary* for their body, what use is that?” (Jas. 2:15–16, emphasis added).

Christians who have “the world’s goods”—that is, more money or material possessions than they need—have a responsibility and calling to share. But the Bible does not place an artificial cap on how much one may gain or possess. The biblical prohibition is against *greed*—also referred to in Scripture as “loving money” or “making money one’s master.” The love of money is the root of all sorts of evil (1 Tim. 6:10). It can lead to breaking God’s commandments, either by how one gains or uses one’s money.

Job was a millionaire by modern standards. He owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 oxen, 500 female donkeys, and many servants who took care of all that livestock (see Job 1:3). Yet he was, according to God, the most righteous man on the earth during his time (Job 1:8). He didn’t break any of God’s

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commandments by how he gained or used his wealth.

Could Job's possessions have led him "away from the love of God"? Certainly, had he allowed them to do so. But He didn't. Rather, he used his wealth not only to provide employment for many people, but also to care for the poor and oppressed:

Because I delivered the poor who cried for help,  
And the orphan who had no helper.  
The blessing of the one ready to perish came upon me,  
And I made the widow's heart sing for joy.  
I put on righteousness, and it clothed me;  
My justice was like a robe and a turban.  
I was eyes to the blind  
And feet to the lame.  
I was a father to the needy,  
And I investigated the case which I did not know.  
I broke the jaws of the wicked  
And snatched the prey from his teeth (Job 29:12–17).

Had Job not been so wealthy, he could not have done nearly as much good for the needy. All Christians who have more than they need (from a biblical standpoint) should follow his good example. Jesus told all His followers (most of whom were not wealthy even by first-century standards):

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matt. 6:19–21).

This theme is reiterated throughout the Bible. For example, after delivering the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, God told them:

For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper. When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget

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the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (Deut. 8:7–14).

Obviously, God was not opposed to His people prospering under His blessing. Rather, He was concerned that, once they were blessed, they would lose their motivation to obey His commandments—such as the ones that forbade theft and deception and required compassion for widows and orphans.

King David, also a very wealthy man, understood this spiritual concept. He wrote in Psalm 62:10, “If riches increase, do not set your heart upon them.” God desires and deserves that our hearts should be set upon Him. Those whose hearts are set upon Him obey His commandments. As Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15).



# Chapter 7

## The Doctrine of Plain, Part 2

WBP? Chapter 3, pages 54–62

Near the end of chapter 3 of *Why Be Plain?* Weaver and Zimmerman explain what a person must do to become a member of a Plain church:

To become a member of a Plain Church, one must repent of his sins, confess his belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior, and be baptized in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (p. 57).

That, of course, is all very scriptural and sounds supportive of a Plain practice. What the authors don't say, however, is that for the most part, no one from the outside is joining Plain churches. Only young adults who have been born and raised in Plain families become members. The reason for the discrepancy between outsiders and insiders joining is that young adults raised in Plain communities are under immense social pressure to become church members. Their families and friends want them to become members. They have been taught all their lives about the importance of obeying their parents. They all know that marriage in their Plain church is contingent upon church membership.

They are also under immense religious pressure to become members. They are told that God ordained that they be born into Plain families because He wants them to be Plain. They are told that if they don't become Plain church members, they have no hope of eternal life but only the dread of eternal hell.

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Consequently, many of those young people—perhaps a large majority of them—just go through the motions and do what is expected of them. They are not actually believers in and followers of Christ. They have never been born again. They are not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. They display no fruit of the Spirit. They have simply said some words before their baptism that include a vow to obey the church ordnung. Basically, they vowed to always be Plain. And all their family and relatives were pleased with them rather than displeased, as would have been the case had they chosen not to join the church. And now marriage becomes a possibility. But had they not been born into Plain culture, they would never have become Plain.

I know that this whole system is well-intended. All parents around the world hope that their children will adopt their values, religion and social structure. I had a similar experience growing up. I joined my family's Presbyterian church as a young adult, making the required public confession of faith. But looking back now, I am certain that I just went through the motions. I was not born again then. That didn't occur until several years later.

Weaver and Zimmerman continue:

But Jesus did not just say to baptize new believers, but “Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt 28:20).

The Plain People seek to do that. They must teach their members to observe every commandment of Jesus, and they have a set of guidelines called the “Ordnung.” Those guidelines help the members apply the teachings of Jesus to real life (p. 57).

First, referring to the ordnung as “a set of guidelines” is dishonest. The ordnung consists of hundreds of extra-biblical *rules* that are enforced under the threat of excommunication, shunning, and hellfire. All Plain people are required to pledge—at their baptism and twice annually—to keep all those rules. Thus, the ordnung rules are elevated to equal status with divine commandments. Calling them “guidelines,” as Weaver and Zimmerman do repeatedly, is an attempt to soften the obvious, actual truth about them.

Second, Jesus did not say, “Teach them to observe all things I have commanded you, and then help them to apply My teachings to real life by devising hundreds of additional rules that govern every detail of their lives, down to the width of their hat brims.”

Not only did Jesus not say or imply anything remotely close to that, but His apostles—who heard His “Great Commission” recorded in Matthew 28:20—did not practice anything remotely close to that. *The early church had no ordnung*. Anyone who states or implies otherwise is either grossly ignorant or patently dishonest.

## *The Doctrine of Plain, Part 2*

Most Christian churches in the world today and throughout church history have not had anything that even remotely resembles the ordnungs of Plain churches. The early church, like all Bible-based churches since then, understood that *Christ's commandments, by themselves, are sufficient, and that no other motivation to obey them is necessary other than love for the Lord Jesus Christ* (see John 14:15, 21). True followers of Jesus don't need hundreds of extra rules—enforced under the threat of excommunication, shunning, and hellfire—to motivate them to obey His commandments. If they think they do, that is a tacit admission that they don't love Jesus.

I am not claiming that there are no members of Plain churches who love Jesus. However, Plain people who actually do love Jesus don't need an ordnung to help them obey His commandments. If every Plain church discarded its ordnung and its threat of the bann, it would soon be very obvious who loves Jesus and who does not. What is in everyone's hearts would be revealed by their actions. But because of the ordnung, Plain people can hide what is in their hearts through outward conformity to hundreds of man-made rules.

Weaver and Zimmerman clearly understand this, but they can't see beyond Plain traditions. They write:

The claim that the Plain People put more emphasis on being plain than on Jesus *is hopefully not true*. The ministry [bishops and ministers] clearly teaches that Jesus comes first and being plain is simply applying Jesus' commandments to life. But it is each individual's duty to make sure that it is that way for him, and that his outer conservatism [that is, his outward adherence to all the requirements of the ordnung] stems from an inner love for Jesus (p. 56, emphasis added).

Note the subtle admission, in the first sentence of this paragraph, that Plain people sometimes may place more emphasis on keeping the hundreds of ordnung rules than on Jesus. But according to the next sentence, that is not the fault of the Plain bishops and ministers, because they teach that Jesus "comes first and being plain is simply applying Jesus' commandments to life."

We must ask, however, "How would someone who puts Jesus first behave differently from the person who puts more emphasis on being plain? The only difference between them is the inner motivation of the heart. Obviously, according to Weaver and Zimmerman, one can keep all the outward requirements of the ordnung without having the inward motivation of love for Jesus.

That fact exposes the inherent flaw in all ordnungs: they provide a mask that can hide the inner spiritual reality. They deceive people into thinking they are okay (or *hopefully* okay) in God's sight, when they are actually on the road to hell. Their thin, outward veneer, as well as their unregenerate hearts, will

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be fully exposed at the judgment. I fear not only that many Plain people fit that description, but that many Plain bishops, ministers and deacons may be among them.

Weaver and Zimmerman, and probably most Plain leaders, instinctively understand all this. Near the end of chapter 3, they repeatedly warn against “being Plain” [that is, keeping all the requirements of the ordnung] while at the same time neglecting “the weightier matters of Christianity, such as love, mercy, and faith” (p. 57). That, again, is an admission that one can keep all the ordnung rules and yet ignore what is, according to Jesus, most important (see Matt. 23:23). *That is also an admission that the ordnung doesn't actually help people, as the authors claim, to “apply the teachings of Jesus to real life,” because they have just admitted that one can keep the ordnung and ignore Jesus' most important teachings.*

No amount of ordnung rules, or their enforcement, does anything to change people's hearts. Rather, ordnungs potentially help people deceive themselves (and others) about what is in their hearts.

Again, Weaver and Zimmerman know this, but they can't see beyond the box of Plain traditions. They ask, “If we're plain simply for the sake of fitting into our community, what will it profit?” (p. 58).

The obvious answer to their rhetorical question is, “It will profit nothing.” Clearly, Weaver and Zimmerman believe that some people are guilty of keeping the ordnung just for the sake of fitting into their communities rather than out of love for Jesus. But they can't see how that very common phenomenon exposes the inherent flaw of all ordnungs. *Ordnungs, although perhaps well-meaning, create behavioral motivations based on social pressure that compete with the motivation of love for Christ.*

Jesus wants us to obey Him because we love Him and want to please Him, not because we want to please our friends and family. *In fact, if our motivation for “obeying Jesus” is anything other than love for Him, it is not “obeying Jesus.”*

Weaver and Zimmerman might claim ordnungs exist to “help members apply Jesus' teachings to real life” (p. 57), but they actually create a competing behavioral motivation to “fit into their communities” (p. 58). That statement is indisputable, because the punishment for transgressions against the ordnung is *rejection by the community*. In such cases, one's community is one's master, not Jesus. The ordnung thus becomes an idol, stealing hearts that rightfully should be devoted to God. Think about that!

The question Plain people, including Weaver and Zimmerman, should be asking themselves is this one: What percentage of Plain people keep the ordnung because of love for Jesus, and what percentage keep the ordnung because of fear of community rejection?

## *The Doctrine of Plain, Part 2*

### **A White-Hat Ordnung**

Let's consider a very simple example. Imagine Jesus saying to a group of 10 friends, "I have one commandment for all of you. Whenever you go outside, you must wear a white cowboy hat. If you love Me, you will keep My commandment."

From that point on, everyone who loves Jesus would wear their white cowboy hat when outside. Everyone who didn't love Jesus wouldn't bother. And it would be easy to tell who in the group loved Jesus and who did not. Consequently, all the consistent white-hat folks would try to persuade everyone else in the group to believe that Jesus was indeed the Son of God before whom everyone will one day stand in judgment. Anyone whom they persuaded would, of course, start wearing a white cowboy hat when outside.

Now, imagine that some white-hat leaders in the group decided to create an ordnung that contained just one rule—a rule against *owning* any hats other than white cowboy hats. The reason for the rule, they agreed, would be to "help members keep Jesus' commandment." They knew people would be much less likely to break Jesus' single commandment if no one owned any inappropriate hats. Their ordnung would help to eliminate temptation and thereby eliminate sin.

Imagine that they also agreed that anyone caught owning any forbidden hat would be confronted, and if he repented on his knees in front of all 10 families, he would be forgiven, but he still would have to suffer two weeks of shunning. And if he was not willing to repent on his knees in front of all 10 families, he would be excommunicated by a vote of the group, and they would not speak to him, eat with him, employ him, or work for him until he repented. If he never repented, they would shun him for life.

What would the outcome be?

As soon as the one-rule ordnung was announced to the group, all the people who loved Jesus—and who consequently had been wearing white cowboy hats whenever they went outside—would think to themselves, "I don't need this new ordnung rule to help me obey Jesus' commandment, because I've only been wearing white cowboy hats since I first believed in Jesus and was born again. I love Him!" They would, however, probably discard any other hats they still owned just to keep peace in the group.

All the people who had not been wearing white cowboy hats would inwardly resent the new ordnung, but they would comply outwardly. They would start wearing white cowboy hats to avoid being excommunicated by their families and friends. They might keep all their other hats, but they would hide them in their attics or basements to prevent their discovery by anyone in the group.

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From then on, everyone in the group would be wearing white cowboy hats—both the believers in Jesus and the unbelievers. Everyone would appear to be a believer, even those who were not. Evangelism of unbelievers would be a thing of the past. Most unbelievers would start thinking they were believers.

Three generations later, not one of the descendants of the original group would own anything but a white cowboy hat. And it would be possible that *not a single one of them would actually love Jesus*. Think about that.

Though imperfect, that illustration makes two important points: (1) ordnungs serve no valuable purpose for those who believe in and love Jesus, and (2) they help to deceive those who don't believe in and love Jesus, especially in later generations. That is exactly what has happened in Plain circles.

### **The Authors Demonstrate What They Decry**

Near the end of chapter 3, Weaver and Zimmerman inadvertently admit both of these points as they list the many ways in which Plain people who keep every article of the ordnung can still be worldly:

If we walk along the fence of the church guidelines looking for a hole to get what we covet [that is, anything forbidden by the ordnung fence], we likely will find what we're after. But it's usually our downfall and not a blessing. *We can be plain externally and still be worldly in God's eyes*. Here are a few examples. We are still worldly if:

We crowd the church guidelines trying to get as much of the world as we can. [So, do Plain people need a second fence to keep them away from the first fence? A third fence to keep them away from the second fence?]

We avoid living like the world, but still love and desire their ways.

We avoid flashy, immodest clothing of the world, but dress to impress nonetheless. [So such a thing must be possible, even when wearing Plain uniforms.]

We avoid the high things of the world such as sports cars, but take pride in driving a horse that is faster and better looking than our neighbor's. [So should Plain people always make sure that the horses they purchase are slower and worse-looking than their neighbors' horses?]

We avoid building a house with all the design and luxuries that the world does, but still build and design to impress. [So Plain people should always make sure the houses they build for themselves aren't in any way superior to their neighbors' houses?]

We obey the guidelines of the church but disobey the weightier teaching of Jesus when we can get away with it. [This is a tacit admission that the ordnung does not "help the members apply the (weightier) teachings of Jesus to real life."]

## *The Doctrine of Plain, Part 2*

The list could go on and on, but the point is clear—nonconformity is more than just being a little different in outer appearance. It is having a completely different mind set [sic] and a transformed heart (p. 59, emphasis mine).

The authors repeatedly affirm through these examples that one can keep the ordnung but still be worldly (in the Plain sense) and disobey the “weightier teaching of Jesus.” And in this very passage, the authors actually demonstrate what they disdain. Three times in this passage, the authors refer to the ordnung—which consists of hundreds of rules that are enforced by threat of excommunication, shunning, and hellfire—as “guidelines.” This is a gross mischaracterization. The authors are being deceptive, violating the simple ethic of honesty—which suggests that their own ordnung does not help them keep “the weightier teaching of Jesus.”

### **And They Do It Again**

Just four sentences after the passage quoted above, Weaver and Zimmerman again demonstrate the very thing they decry:

Being Plain gives us no right to be self-righteous. *It is well and good that Plain People are not conformed to the world and obey the Bible more literally than many other people.* But the moment we become proud of this we are in the wrong. Self-righteous pride is always wrong, regardless of whether we are taking pride in something that is right.

The moment we feel superior to more liberal Christians we have become like the self-righteous Pharisee, saying “God, I thank Thee that I am not like those liberal Christians. I dress much more plainly, I avoid the high things of the world, and my lifestyle is one of humility” (pp. 59–60, emphasis added).

It is astounding that, within the same passage in which the authors decry self-righteousness and the pharisaical attitude of thinking one is superior to others, they also boast that Plain people—like themselves—are “obeying the Bible more literally than many others.” More specifically, unlike “liberal Christians,” Plain people “dress much more plainly ... avoid the high things of the world” and live a “lifestyle ... of humility.” Wow. While they boast about the humility of Plain people like themselves, the authors warn against being proud about it.

I honestly do not know how any Plain person can avoid the temptation to which Weaver and Zimmerman have succumbed. Recently, I was waiting in the lobby of a medical facility with a number of other people when two middle-aged Amish couples walked in, wearing standard Amish winter garb, complete with black capes and bonnets. They dramatically stood out from everyone else in the lobby, and they, and everyone there was conscious of it. Had anyone asked those Amish couples why they were dressed so differ-

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ently, if they had been honest, they would have had to say, “We are wearing this clothing because we are not worldly like all of you, and that is why we don’t want to look like you.” How could that not be prideful?

If you are a Plain reader, put yourself in our “English” shoes. Imagine, on a Sunday morning gathering at which everyone is dressed plainly and wearing the ordnung-approved styles and colors, a man and his wife walk in wearing all white clothing. The man is wearing a white suit, shirt, socks, shoes and hat. The woman is wearing a white dress, shoes and head scarf. It would be clear that they were purposely dressing to stand out from everyone else. Then imagine questioning them about their clothing and hearing them reply, “According to many Bible passages such as Revelation 7, God wants everyone to wear white clothing. White symbolizes purity. That is why we dress more biblically than all of you!” What would you think of such people? Might you suspect that they were a little proud?

### **Were the Early Christians Plain?**

In the final section of chapter 3, titled “How Nonconformity was Lost,” the authors claim that the early Christians were like Plain people today:

Many people think that the Plain People’s ways—strict and literal obedience to Jesus’ teachings—started with the Anabaptist [sic]. But the Anabaptist [sic] were not starting something that had never been. They were reestablishing the church to what it had been before it was corrupted by Constantine and Rome. What the Plain People live and believe today is very similar to the first and second century churches started by the apostles. This indicates that they are on the right track (p. 62).

There is no doubt that the original Anabaptists—who lived during the time of the Protestant Reformation—played a significant role in recovering a more biblical Christianity. But to claim that modern Plain lifestyles resemble that of the first- and second-century Christians is extremely misleading. We know a lot about how first-century Christians lived, because we can read about it in New Testament epistles and the book of Acts. They differed from today’s Plain people in many ways.

That same New Testament informs us that some first-century churches drifted from truth and needed correction (see Rev. 1–3 for example). In light of those biblically documented first-century theological and behavioral deviations, it would be risky to assume that all the writings of the apostolic fathers (early Christian theologians who are thought to have had personal contact with or close influence from the original twelve apostles) reflect apostolic faith and practice. Therefore, even if *some* of the apostolic fathers seem to advocate *some* of what modern Plain people practice, that is no proof that they learned those practices from the original twelve apostles. We are always safe, however, in sticking with Scripture.

# Chapter 8

## Ruling Out Temptations, Part 1

WBP? Chapter 4, pages 63-70

As one reads through *Why Be Plain?* one realizes that practically the entire book is a defense of Plain ordnungs. That should be no surprise, because Plain ordnungs are what set Plain groups apart from all other Christian groups. Ordnungs define distinctive Plain practices and lifestyles.

Weaver and Zimmerman continue their defense in chapter 4 of their book by first addressing a misconception regarding Plain ordnungs that is expressed within another imaginary conversation between cousins Dan and Steve. In that conversation, Dan quotes Jesus' words in Mark 7:6-8:

Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men." Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.

Dan then concludes, "If a church has man-made rules, they worship Jesus in vain!" (p. 64).

Weaver and Zimmerman point out that Jesus was not condemning ordnungs, but only human traditions that *nullify* God's commandments. For proof of this position, they point to the immediately following verses of Mark 7:

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[Jesus] was also saying to them, “You are experts at *setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition*. For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death’; but you say, ‘If a man says to his father or his mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given to God),’ you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or his mother’; thus invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that” (Mark 7:9–13, emphasis added).

From what I know about Plain ordnungs, I generally agree with Weaver and Zimmerman that Plain ordnungs do not nullify God’s commandments, at least not directly. I have never seen a rule in a Plain ordnung that requires or allows Plain people to ignore God’s commandments. For example, the requirement to drive a horse and buggy does not require breaking any of God’s commandments.

However, in the passage under consideration in Mark’s Gospel, *nullifying* God’s commandments by human tradition is not the only thing Jesus was condemning. He was also condemning the *neglect* of God’s commandments due to an excessive focus on human traditions, something that Weaver and Zimmerman have already admitted exists to some degree in Plain circles. In addition, those ordnung rules are made equal with God’s commandments, as they are punishable by the church under the threat of excommunication, shunning, and hellfire.

Throughout their book, Weaver and Zimmerman consistently defend Plain ordnungs by claiming that ordnung rules help Plain people follow Jesus’ commandments. Here’s one of many examples of that claim from chapter 4:

Do the Plain Churches reject God’s commandments and replace them with their own? No, they simply make guidelines on how to apply God’s commandments to real life (p. 66).

I only wish the authors would give readers some examples of their claim. I am doing my best to obey Jesus’ commandments, but I don’t see how shaving off my God-given mustache but not trimming my beard would help me in that regard. Jesus never said a word to His followers about mustaches or beards. I also don’t see how making sure my hair is not cut above my ears could help me obey Jesus’ commandments.

I don’t see how wearing a straw hat that has a brim width of exactly 3-1/2 inches (or 4 inches if I were a minister) would help me obey Jesus’ commandments.

I don’t understand how following an ordnung rule that allows me to own a riding lawn mower—but only to pull heavy loads and not to mow my

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lawn—will help me follow Jesus’ commandments. (That is an actual *ordnung* rule in some Plain communities.) And hundreds of similar rules could be cited—such as the prohibition against smoking *white* cigarettes but not *brown* ones—that have no connection to any of Jesus’ commandments.

My wife is also doing her best to obey Jesus’ commandments, but she can’t see how removing all the buttons from her dresses and using only straight-pin fasteners would help her in that regard. Neither can she understand how following an *ordnung* rule that requires apron belts to be 1 inch wide but not 1.25 inches wide (some *ordnungen* specify exactly 2 inches) would help her follow Jesus’ commandments. (That too is an actual *ordnung* rule in some Plain communities.)

Neither can my wife understand how wearing black shoes, black socks, black aprons, black bonnets, black capes (pinned horizontally, not vertically), black sweaters, and black coats will help her follow the God who created millions of colors. Jesus told His followers not to worry about clothing, assuring them that God’s “clothing” of the beautiful lilies of the field (usually white) surpassed Solomon’s glorious attire (see Matt. 5:28–29). Who could read that passage and conclude that God expects His people, created in His image, to continually clothe themselves in black, a color universally associated with sorrow, death, judgment, darkness, and ignorance? In heaven, the saints are clothed in white garments (Rev. 14:9–14).

My wife and I both play the guitar, and we don’t understand how not playing our guitars would help us obey Jesus’ commandments (especially because we play only worship songs). We can’t understand how the prohibition of any musical instruments other than harmonicas could help us better obey Jesus, especially in light of the fact that the Bible urges God’s people to praise Him by utilizing musical instruments (see Ps. 33:1–3; 71:22–23; 150:1–6).

We don’t understand how not reading the Bible “too much”—a caution advocated in some Plain circles where members who studied the Bible on their own decided to leave the community—could help us better obey Jesus’ commandments. Jesus’ commandments are all found in the Bible!

Similarly, we don’t understand how not posting Bible verses on our walls or having them printed on our checks or business invoices could help us better obey Jesus’ commandments. (This is another actual *ordnung* rule in some Plain communities.)

In light of the hundreds of varied *ordnung* rules enforced in Plain communities that clearly have no connection to any of Jesus’ commandments, Weaver and Zimmerman, who are certainly aware of those hundreds of Plain *ordnung* rules, seem very dishonest when they claim that Plain *ordnungen* exist only to help Plain people follow Jesus’ commandments.

## *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*

### **Do Modern Times Require Modern Rules?**

The authors continue their defense of Plain ordnungs by asking a rhetorical question that introduces another common justification:

Did He [Jesus] want His church to make no additional guidelines [actually, enforced rules] to compensate for all the problems that would arise with the post-modern age of technology and all sorts of options that tend to lead the church away from God? (p. 65).

Clearly, Weaver and Zimmerman want their readers to believe that modern technology and “all sorts of options” (which are presumably uniquely modern) call for “additional guidelines” beyond Christ’s commandments. They add that “some churches [actually, 99% of all churches] ... refuse to have any guidelines [again, enforced rules] not directly given by the Bible.” And the tragic result, according to Weaver and Zimmerman? “Generally, there is no separation from the world” (p. 66).

Of course, what the authors mean is that other churches have no separation from the world as Plain people understand separation, as directed by Plain ordnungs. That is, churches without ordnungs allow their church members to drive cars and own smart phones, and they don’t force people to wear Plain uniforms.

If Christians anywhere obey the commandments of their Lord Jesus Christ, their lives will be profoundly different from the lives of nonbelievers. There may not be a separation from the world in the Plain sense, but there will certainly be a separation from the world in a biblical sense.

Weaver and Zimmerman continue:

Since many of the things we deal with today such as technology was [sic] nonexistent in Bible times, the members have no guidelines [actually, enforced rules] to go by and usually end up accepting everything. Might this also cause them to commit sins directly condemned in the Bible, due to lack of guidance? (p. 66).

So there are “sins directly condemned in the Bible” that church members might commit unless Plain leaders establish extra rules. Clearly, the authors believe church members are incapable on their own of figuring out how to apply God’s commandments when faced with the temptations of modern technology. They need “guidelines” that are punishable by excommunication, shunning, and hellfire.

For example, church members who own a smart phone might be incapable of figuring out how to apply Jesus’ commandment forbidding lust. So they apparently need Plain leaders to create a rule that completely forbids smart phones, punishable by excommunication, shunning, and hellfire. And church

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members who own a car might be incapable of resisting the temptation of using it to drive to a bar and get drunk, a sin “directly condemned in the Bible.” So car ownership must be prohibited by the *ordnung* to prevent church members from getting drunk in bars.

Reading these paragraphs from *Why Be Plain?* gives the impression that Weaver and Zimmerman lead churches of people who are not born again, and thus they are not set free from their slavery to sin. Their perceived need to create “fence laws” to keep Plain people from ignorantly committing “sins directly condemned in the Bible” indicates that Plain people may not truly be Christians.

Weaver and Zimmerman continue:

God gave us principles in the Bible and gave the church [that is, church leaders] the responsibility to apply these principles to the ever-changing world. We have an example in Acts 15 where the leaders had to meet and make guidelines on matters not directly addressed by Scripture. That is the ongoing work of the church today (p. 66).

But Weaver and Zimmerman fail to tell their readers that the gathering of church leaders in Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 15, was not convened to establish new “guidelines” (actually, enforced regulations equal to God’s commandments) that were necessary because of an “ever-changing world.” On the contrary, they met to decide whether Gentile believers should be circumcised and required to keep the Law of Moses. And they decided, based on *Scripture* and the *clear revelation of the Holy Spirit*, that the answer was no. Rather than creating new *ordnung* rules, they effectively abolished old ones. Gentiles needed only to keep the Law of Christ and do a few things to avoid offending Jewish believers. In light of these undeniable facts, it appears that Weaver and Zimmerman are attempting to exploit their readers’ biblical ignorance.

In their next paragraph, they seem to continue in this manner:

Might one example of the traditions of men be the wedding ring worn by members of progressive churches? This ring is worn because it’s society’s tradition. However, the Bible forbids the putting on of jewelry, thus the wedding ring is a tradition of men that makes void the commandment of God (p. 66).

The Bible does not forbid wearing jewelry. In the New Testament passage that I would expect Weaver and Zimmerman to cite, 1 Peter 3:3, Peter simply admonished Christian women to focus more on the inward person than the outward person:

Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden per-

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son of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear (1 Pet. 3:3–6).

If Peter was forbidding Christian women from wearing jewelry, then he was also forbidding them from “putting on dresses” or, if we read the King James Version, from wearing any “apparel.” Does that seem likely?

Clearly, Peter was not forbidding women from styling their hair, wearing any gold jewelry, or from wearing any clothing! Some women in Peter’s time were consumed with styling their hair with elaborate and intricate braiding and other forms of elaborate attire. Women are often susceptible to the temptation to spend excessive time and energy improving their outward appearance. Christian women should resist that temptation and should instead devote themselves to improving their inward character. This, of course, does not mean that they should completely neglect their outward appearance. As in all things, balance is the key.

Regarding Sarah, whose example Peter commends, it is noteworthy that her husband, Abraham, who “was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold” (Gen. 13:2), sent a servant to travel to his relatives to find a wife for his beloved son, Isaac. When it was divinely confirmed to that servant that Rebekah was God’s chosen wife for Isaac, he immediately “took a gold ring weighing a half-shekel and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels in gold” (Gen. 24:22), and he put the ring on her finger and the bracelets on her wrists (see Gen. 24:30).

Several aspects of this story contradict Weaver and Zimmerman’s line of argument. First, engagement and wedding rings do have a biblical basis, and thus they are not “society’s tradition” and do not “make void the commandment of God.” Clearly, it is not true that “the Bible forbids the putting on of jewelry.” Moreover, it seems very likely that Sarah, whom Peter admonished Christian women to imitate, owned and wore jewelry herself, in light of the fact that her husband sent jewelry for his servant to give to Isaac’s bride. Sarah, however, was more focused on her inward character than her outward appearance, even though she was renowned for her outward beauty (see Gen. 12:11, 14).

A wedding ring publicly identifies people as married, which is a godly thing. It also serves as a reminder to all married people of the promises they’ve made to one special person. That is also a godly thing. We have to question why anyone would find fault with that, especially religious leaders, and even more so why religious leaders would twist Scripture to justify finding fault with wedding rings.

## Ruling Out Temptations, Part 1

### Wise Words

Weaver and Zimmerman next turn their attention back to Dan and Steve's imaginary conversation at the beginning of chapter 4, addressing Dan's claim that New Testament "Christian liberty" gives believers "the freedom to live as we please as long as we have the correct belief in our hearts" (see p. 64). That idea is often advocated by false-grace preachers, and Weaver and Zimmerman offer a sound rebuttal:

We are not free from the Law of Christ. Obedience to the laws He gave in the NT is what frees us from sin's chain. James called it the "law of liberty." The Bible says that Christians are made free from sin and have become *servants* of righteousness (Rom. 6:18). But many today, claiming their spiritual liberty, do as they please and fall right back into the chains of sin they had been freed from, becoming servants of sin. That's not freedom in Christ, but freedom from righteousness (p. 69).

But that piece of wisdom ends in their next paragraph, as the authors, once again, endorse submission to hundreds of extra-biblical rules that have no foundation in Scripture:

And we are not free from obedience and submission to the church. The Bible makes that clear. "*Obey them that have rule over you, and submit yourselves*" (Heb. 13:17). What's to submit to if the leaders are not allowed to set standards? (p. 69).

That last sentence, italicized by the authors for emphasis, is a "non sequitur," a Latin phrase meaning "it does not follow." A non sequitur is a conclusion or statement that does not logically follow from the previous argument or statement. Weaver and Zimmerman's book is full of non sequiturs, and we've just read one of them. It does not logically follow that just because we should submit to spiritual leaders, those spiritual leaders have the right to establish extra-biblical standards and require obedience to them. Spiritual leaders are supposed to teach people to obey God's commandments.

Suppose that I said, "The law makes it clear that we should obey police. What's to obey if the police are not allowed to make laws?" Would you think that my second sentence logically follows my first sentence? Of course not. Police enforce the laws made by higher authorities. They do not make laws themselves.

### Avoiding Temptation

Weaver and Zimmerman continue to grasp at straws to find justification for Plain ordnungs by yet another misapplication of Scripture:

*"Abstain from all appearance of evil"* (1 Thess. 5:22). That indicates that we should not only avoid those things that are obviously evil, but also that which is questionable. Much of today's technology, although perhaps

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not evil in itself, has the appearance of evil and has led many into evil. Therefore the Plain Churches have heeded the above Scripture and have abstained from it. Many of their rules are made because something has the appearance and potential for evil, and could lead away from obedience to the NT. ...

The Plain Churches ... seek to avoid and forbid those things that open the door to temptation. The Bible does not only instruct us to resist temptation, but to avoid it where possible so that we don't even have the opportunity to sin. That's what our Ordnung is for. It doesn't make sense to pray "Lead us not into temptation," and then turn around and pick up a smart phone that is laden with endless temptations (pp. 69–70).

First, to abstain "from all appearance of evil" is to abstain from things that are not actually evil but could appear evil. It is not abstaining from things that can be used for good or evil. An example of the "appearance of evil" would be two unmarried people of opposite sexes sharing a hotel room to save money on hotel expenses. Even if nothing immoral occurs in that hotel room, the man and woman did not "avoid the appearance of evil." Onlookers will assume that they did evil behind closed doors.

Second, what specific technology has "the appearance of evil"? The authors cite smart phones, an item owned by 99% of all adults in North America and used 99% of the time for things that are not evil, such as phone calls, texts, taking photos, and obtaining news and information. Yes, porn is available on smart phones for those who desire it, just as immoral sex is available in hundreds of places for Plain people who desire it. Some unmarried Plain people have sex in buggies and barns, but even if buggies and barns were banned, those who want to have immoral sex would find somewhere else to sin. Banning smart phones doesn't change hearts, nor does it keep Plain people who desire to own a smart phone from secretly owning one. In fact, banning them actually makes them more desirable to many people.

Moreover, true followers of Christ who find that they are at risk of sinning due to owning a smart phone will eliminate it themselves, because they love Jesus who said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15), and who also said, "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off" (Mark 9:43). Jesus did not say, "Church leaders, cut off the hands of every church member to prevent any potential that their hands might do wrong." Individual Christians have a personal responsibility to avoid what might cause them to stumble.

Most Plain people own guns, a relatively modern technology that can be used for evil. Why don't Plain leaders ban guns so that church members will avoid the appearance of evil? If a nonbeliever saw a Plain person carrying a gun, he might assume he is a murderer!

## *Ruling Out Temptations, Part 1*

Third, smart phones are not “laden with temptation.” Maybe to Weaver and Zimmerman they are, but not to most of us. We use them every day without stumbling, like any other tool, modern or old-fashioned.

Now, see if you can spot any non sequiturs in the three sentences of Weaver and Zimmerman’s next paragraph:

It is true that [man-made] rules and standards cannot produce Christians. However, a church without [man-made] rules is sure to produce apostasy and worldliness! When a church takes no stand against the world, they soon fall for the world (p. 70).

If man-made rules and standards cannot produce Christians, the next logical statement should be, “So because our goal is to produce Christians, we don’t need any man-made rules and standards.” Instead, however, the authors contradict their initial premise. After declaring that man-made rules and standards are of no value in producing Christians, they declare that they *actually are of value* in producing Christians! They claim that without man-made rules and standards, the result is “apostasy” (falling away from the faith, which disqualifies one from heaven) and “worldliness” (behaving like the world, which also disqualifies one from heaven). Not only are the first two sentences a non sequitur, they are also self-contradictory. Both sentences can’t be true because they make opposite claims.

The third claim, “When a church takes no stand against the world, they soon fall for the world,” sounds like a Plain cliché that has been passed down for generations. It must be interpreted through the Plain lens of “the world,” something we have already considered in earlier chapters.

What Weaver and Zimmerman mean is that when church leaders don’t create and enforce rules against smart phones, car ownership, non-Plain dress, and so on, the members will use smart phones, drive cars, and not dress like Plain people. They would naturally do so because no one would conclude from reading the Bible that there was any reason not to use those things.

As we have noted earlier, 99.99% of the world’s professing Christians don’t interpret the Bible’s warnings against “the world” as Plain people do. Those among them who are born again overcome the temptations of “the world” (as defined by the New Testament) by their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, just as the Bible says: “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith” (1 John 5:4). Jesus lives in us by the Holy Spirit and we are “new creations in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17). The world has lost its attraction to us as we “walk by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16). Hallelujah! All praise to God!



# Chapter 9

## Ruling Out Temptations, Part 2

WBP? Chapter 4, pages 71-80

Apparently Weaver and Zimmerman, along with other Plain people whom they know, have been accused of being Pharisees due to their “conservatism,” a word they often use to describe their Old Order beliefs and practices. Conservatism, by their own definition, is “conserving the standards of Christ” (p. 71).

Plain people believe their hundreds of ordnung rules help them conserve their standards. So conservatism involves keeping all the smallest, detailed requirements of the Plain ordnung. And this is why, the authors claim, people accuse Plain people of being Pharisees, because they, like the Pharisees, keep so many detailed rules. Here is Weaver and Zimmerman’s defense against that accusation:

Jesus never taught or even implied that their [the Pharisees’] fault was conservatism. He clearly taught that it was hypocrisy. And hypocrisy isn’t due to conservatism. It’s due to not being inwardly what one professes outwardly. Anyone who claims to be a Christian but remains carnal within is a Pharisee. It [pharisaism] has nothing to do with conserving the standards of Christ [that is, keeping hundreds of detailed ordnung rules].

Jesus did not criticize the Pharisees for being conservative [keeping hundreds of detailed rules]. He actually encouraged them to keep on being conservative and taking care of small things. The Plain People are called

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Pharisees because they put so much emphasis on not only obeying Jesus and the church [Note: the authors are saying that obeying Jesus and the church are two different things] in big things, but also in the smallest of things. But Jesus told the Pharisees; “*These [weighty matters] ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other [small things] undone*” (Matt 23:23). So Jesus actually told the Pharisees that they *should* have been diligent in the small things, but not while neglecting the big things. ...

It is ironic that professing Christians criticize the Plain People and call them Pharisees for putting so much emphasis on small things, when Jesus said that was the one thing the Pharisees were doing right! (pp. 70-71).

Although it is certainly true that Jesus condemned the Pharisees for their hypocrisy in Matthew 23, the authors’ analysis of Matthew 23:23 overlooks the fact that Jesus was not referencing the Pharisees’ man-made “fence laws” (which would be analogous to an *ordnung*). Rather, He was referring solely to *God’s commandments*, and specifically to their neglect of His “weighty” *commandments* and their greater focus on His less weighty *commandments*. Let’s read it for ourselves:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! (Matt. 23:23).

The Law of Moses required the practice of tithing, and the scribes and Pharisees took that requirement seriously, tithing on all their gains, even from their tiniest garden herbs. According to Jesus, however, there were more important commandments in the Mosaic Law that they neglected, commandments that revolved around “justice and mercy and faithfulness.”

Matthew 23:23 says nothing about man-made laws. So when Jesus said, “These are the things you should have done without neglecting the others,” He did not mean, “You should be keeping hundreds of man-made rules that govern every detail of life, plus keeping the more weighty commandments of God.” No, He was saying, “You should be keeping all of God’s commandments, the less weighty and the more weighty ones.”

Therefore, Weaver and Zimmerman’s analysis is misleading, because they equate the Plain *ordnung* with God’s commandments. Jesus did not commend the scribes and Pharisees for keeping hundreds of man-made rules. He commended them for keeping God’s less weighty *commandments*, and He found fault with them for neglecting the weightier *commandments*.

## *Ruling Out Temptations, Part 2*

### **The Burden of the Ordnung**

Matthew 23 contains many denunciations of the Pharisees, including some denunciations of their man-made rules: “They tie up heavy burdens and lay them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger” (Matt. 23:4). The heavy burdens are clearly a reference to the Pharisees’ extra-biblical requirements. (Even worse, they didn’t burden themselves with the same rules, something of which I hope no Plain leader is guilty.)

Later in this chapter, Weaver and Zimmerman address Matthew 23:4 specifically:

This verse is sometimes referred to claim that the Plain People also lay heavy burdens on the church with all their rules. However, Jesus’ “*commandments are not grievous*” (1 John 5:3). All the Plain People’s guidelines are built on the foundation of Jesus’ commandments, and they are not burdensome to those who love Jesus (p. 74).

Those three sentences contain another non sequitur as well as two falsehoods.

It does not logically follow that because Jesus’ commandments are not burdensome, hundreds of additional rules are also not burdensome (even if they have some relationship to Jesus’ commandments). One would actually expect the exact opposite to be true. Any honest Plain person will admit (and many have admitted to me) that following hundreds of ordnung rules is burdensome. How could it be otherwise? If I hired you to accomplish ten specific tasks every day, but then one day I gave you an extra hundred tasks to accomplish, would you not consider those extra tasks burdensome?

The first falsehood in the above-quoted passage is, once again, the referring to hundreds of ordnung rules as “guidelines.” Every time Weaver and Zimmerman use that word to describe Plain ordnungs, they are being dishonest, because ordnung rules are obligatory requirements, the breaking of which is seen as threatening one’s salvation.

The second falsehood is the claim that “all the Plain People’s guidelines are built on the foundation of Jesus’ commandments.” We have already seen that this is not true. It is ironic that just one page after making these false claims, the authors write, “The Plain People...have a widely-known reputation for honesty” (p. 75).

### **The Disciplining of Ordnung-Violators**

Weaver and Zimmerman realize that Plain People are also often accused as being pharisaic for their severe disciplining—which includes excommunication and shunning—of those who violate extra-biblical rules of Plain ordnungs:

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Perhaps another reason the Plain People are accused of being like the Pharisees is because they are still willing to discipline erring [adult] children and wayward church members for actions other than the obvious sins spelled out in the Bible. Sometimes discipline is used when a member's attitude toward church guidelines is hostile.

However, disobedience toward church or parental guidelines is disobedience nonetheless, if those guidelines are not working against God's truth. As Christ says in Luke 16:10, "*He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.*" How then can we say that small acts of disobedience are not worthy of discipline? (p. 76).

Three times in this short passage about *disciplining ordnung violators*, Weaver and Zimmerman refer to ordnung rules as "*guidelines*"! At least they are honest in admitting that Plain People do discipline church members "for actions other than the obvious sins spelled out in the Bible." Yet they act as if, in so doing, they are preserving a biblical practice that other churches have abandoned: "[Plain churches] are *still willing* to discipline erring children and wayward church members for actions other than the obvious sins spelled out in the Bible." *Still willing*? What church, including the apostolic church, ever disciplined church members for actions other than "the obvious sins spelled out in the Bible"?

And what is their defense for this practice? To paraphrase the authors, "Disobedience is disobedience, whether it be against God's rules or church rules." In one sense, they are correct here. Rules, especially ones that have no moral basis, must be enforced or they will not be obeyed. If you are going to maintain conformity to the ordnung, you must enforce it by disciplining violators. Many Amish and former Amish people have told me about ordnung rules in their communities that no one obeyed because they were not enforced.

In any case, Weaver and Zimmerman once again twist Scripture to buttress their point that "small acts of disobedience" against extra-biblical rules are "worthy of discipline." This time they amazingly quote Jesus' words about the importance of being faithful in "small things," found at the conclusion of His parable of the unjust steward in Luke 16. However, in that parable Jesus makes no reference to being faithful to man-made rules. Rather, He called his followers to be faithful with the money God has entrusted to us. As He said in applying the parable, "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous wealth, who will entrust the true riches to you?" (Luke 16:11). More specifically, Jesus wants us to obey God's commandments regarding caring for the poor. He said two verses earlier that He expects us to use our money to "make friends" so that we will be "welcomed into the eternal dwellings" (Luke 16:9).

## Ruling Out Temptations, Part 2

### Why Swallow Gnats?

But Weaver and Zimmerman are not done with twisting Scripture to justify Plain doctrine. They turn again to Jesus' sacred words:

When the Plain People discipline the unrepentant attitude in those who look at Biblical guidelines as an inconvenience to be overcome, they are compared to the Pharisees where Christ told them they strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. But why not take care of both the camels and gnats? Should we willingly swallow gnats left and right just because camels are worse? This leads back to a point made earlier; that just because the big problems are more important doesn't mean the little problems should be ignored. That's completely missing Jesus' point (p. 76).

First, once again, Weaver and Zimmerman refer to ordnung rules as "guidelines" even when they are talking about disciplining *guideline violators*. And they repeat the falsehood that "guidelines" are "biblical." There is no example in the Bible of spiritual leaders creating hundreds of extra-biblical rules that were enforced by threat of excommunication, shunning and hellfire.

Second, the authors attempt to soften the harsh and bizarre Plain practice of excommunicating and shunning one's own family members for unrepentant infractions against man-made ordnung rules that have no moral basis—by stating that Plain leaders "discipline the unrepentant *attitude* in those who look at Biblical guidelines as an inconvenience to overcome" (emphasis mine). The truth, however, is *people*, not attitudes, are the targets of discipline. And *people*, not attitudes, suffer the horrific pain of being excommunicated and shunned—for no biblical reason—by their family members.

Third, when Jesus condemned the Pharisees of His day for "straining out gnats and swallowing camels," He was illustrating their practice of focusing on what was of minor importance and ignoring what was of major importance. Weaver and Zimmerman claim that Plain people focus on both, but the actual evidence leads to a different conclusion.

For example, when a group enforces detailed rules regarding men's hat brims and women's cap strings, as well as hundreds of other minor lifestyle regulations, but has no concern for the hundreds of millions of people around the world who have never once heard Jesus' name, is that group balancing the gnats and camels properly?<sup>9</sup>

And when a group excommunicates and shuns someone for the rest of his life for not repenting of owning a guitar that he uses to worship God, but welcomes a man who has repeatedly sexually molested children (but who al-

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<sup>9</sup> Later in *Why Be Plain?* Weaver and Zimmerman spend almost an entire chapter defending why Plain churches ignore Jesus' Great Commission.

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ways “repents”)—a man whom even the corrupt world understands should spend decades in prison for his perverse and vile crimes—is that group balancing the gnats and camels appropriately?

### **A Needed Wall?**

Ordnungs are absolutely essential, according to Weaver and Zimmerman:

Guidelines are needed if a church is to uphold the rules of Christ.

The church that wishes to obey God and remain unspotted by the world must erect a wall to keep the world out. That wall is their guidelines or Ordnung. While some people see these standards as something to minimize personal freedom, it would be more right to say they are for the sake of minimizing the chance of spiritual destruction. These standards take away many of the options and temptations that lead down the slippery slope to sin. ... When a church has no guidelines, its members tend to fall into sin and discord. ...

Church standards benefit the members in many ways, including in that they narrow life so that we do not have as many options and therefore not as many things distracting us from pure Christian living.

The more options a Christian has, the more temptations he will face. Therefore the Plain Churches, by ruling out various options, helps its members to not even have many of the temptations that the permissive churches continually are afflicted by.

Only when we are not fully submitted to the standards of our church does the forbidden become a temptation. But a true Christian submits to the church and its leaders, just as the Bible commands. Only by disobeying God can a Christian disobey a church guideline. Even if we believe a guideline is unnecessary, we’d still be disobeying a multitude of Biblical commandments by not submitting, and would undoubtedly have to answer for the purposeful disobedience at the final judgment (pp. 77-78).

Five times in that short passage, the authors once again refer to ordnungs that consist of hundreds of enforced extra-biblical rules as “guidelines,” claiming they are “needed if a church is to uphold the rules of Christ.” The ordnung that Weaver and Zimmerman follow doesn’t seem able to guide them away from using deceptive language to mischaracterize the nature of ordnungs.

If ordnungs are essential to “uphold the rules of Christ,” why didn’t Jesus Himself teach His followers not only His commandments, but also hundreds of additional ordnung rules that would help them uphold His commandments? Why didn’t the apostles do the same? Why haven’t most churches over the past 2,000 years done this? Are Plain church-

## *Ruling Out Temptations, Part 2*

es the only churches that have ever fully “upheld the rules of Christ”? Regarding the authors’ point that ordnung standards “take away many of the options and temptations that lead down the slippery slope to sin,” that is no doubt true. Of course, if you really want to control people’s behavior, prison is the best place to do that. No one ever robbed a bank from prison. If you put prisoners in solitary confinement, you can keep them from punching fellow prisoners. If you tape their mouths shut, you can keep them from using curse words. There is no end to how “holy” you can force people to be; all you need is enough restraint.

Notice that the word “holy” in my last sentence was in quotation marks. That is because *imposed holiness is not holiness at all*. It is coercion. No one finds any virtue in prison inmates who manage not to rob banks while in prison. Similarly, God finds no virtue in Plain people who do what is right only because they have no option to do wrong.

God has placed all of us in an environment that includes temptation. Starting in the Garden of Eden, He has allowed the devil to tempt people (but with limitations). Free moral agents must be tested. Thus the reason for the “forbidden fruit.”

According to 1 Corinthians 10:13, God will never allow His children to be tempted beyond what they are able, but with the temptation He will provide the way of escape also, so that they will be able to endure it. That is a Spirit-inspired promise. Church leaders who believe that they must limit their church members’ temptations by means of hundreds of enforced extra-biblical rules don’t believe that promise.

Of course, those who are not born again are not God’s children, and they don’t have the Holy Spirit living in them to empower them to be holy. And that may be why Plain leaders have to resort to ordnungs to get Plain church members to display the outward appearance of holiness. That may also be why Weaver and Zimmerman believe that without ordnung rules, Plain church members will stray. Perhaps they have been driving herds of goats rather than leading flocks of sheep?

Astonishingly, as we already read, Weaver and Zimmerman declare that to disobey *any* ordnung rule of the church is to disobey God:

A true Christian submits to the church and its leaders, just as the Bible commands. Only by disobeying God can a Christian disregard a church guideline. Even if we believe a guideline is unnecessary, we’d still be disobeying a multitude of Biblical commandments by not submitting, and would undoubtedly have to answer for the purposeful disobedience at the final judgment (p. 78).

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According to this passage, God will judge Plain people not only on the basis of His commandments but also on the basis of hundreds of ordnung rules, because Christians are supposed to submit to their leaders who make those rules. Plain men will stand before God and give an account for the width of their hat brims! Plain women will stand before God and give an account for their obedient use of straight pins to fasten their dresses! And every Plain person will be judged by God for hundreds of other man-made rules. Heaven or hell hinges on hat widths and straight pins?

### **Another Justification for Ordnungs: Avoiding “Slippery Slopes”**

“It could lead to other things” is the rationale Plain leaders often use to explain why harmless things are prohibited by the ordnung. Weaver and Zimmerman also resort to that explanation:

Let’s take, for example, putting electricity in our houses. This may seem harmless if it were only used to run devices such as a stove. However, it opens up a whole world of electrical technology that is by no means harmless.

The nonconformed [Plain] church must have a stopping point in everything, for without one they would stop nothing short of worldliness (p. 80).

That second paragraph, which sounds like an oft-repeated Plain cliché, is another insulting commentary on Plain people by Plain leaders. Plain people apparently cannot be trusted to set personal “stopping points.” Unless the leaders set stopping points for them, the average Plain person will “stop nothing short of worldliness”—transgressing both God’s commandments and church rules.

If that is actually true (and I hope it is not), it reveals two things: (1) No Plain person apparently loves Jesus, because Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). People who love Jesus set “stopping points” according to their understanding of His commandments. (2) No Plain person is actually born again, because being born again sets people free from slavery to sin and empowers them to live holy lives. As John wrote, “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (1 John 3:9).

The New Testament teaches, “Law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane” (1 Tim. 1:9). Laws are needed *to restrain those who need restraint*. But righteous people don’t need laws to restrain them, because they are motivated from their good hearts to do what is right. For example, even if there were no laws prohibiting murder, righteous people would never murder anyone.

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If Plain people do not actually love Jesus and are not born again, all that an ordnung can do for them is to cover them with a thin veneer of outward, public conformity. But on the inside, the Pharisee still lives. Such folks are “like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones” (Matt. 23:27).

To prohibit an adult from having home electricity because he might use it for something evil is to treat him like a child who lacks any self-restraint. Hundreds of millions of devoted followers of Christ have electricity in their homes without using it for evil purposes. As I write these words, I’m sitting on an electric heating pad for warmth on a cold winter day. I’m drinking a cup of coffee that was brewed using electricity. I’m typing these words on an electrically powered laptop computer by the light of an electric lamp. And I am involved in many other virtuous projects in which electricity plays a part.

I am so thankful for the blessing of electricity, something created by God for both heaven and earth: “Out from [His] throne come *flashes of lightning* and sounds and peals of thunder” (Rev. 4:5, emphasis added). Every God-made atom on earth contains positively charged protons and negatively charged electrons. Beyond these things, our brains convey signals to every cell in our bodies by means of electrical and chemical signals, sometimes firing several hundred nerve impulses in a second. God has “wired” us all!

The electricity that flows through our nerves to activate muscles can be used for good or evil, depending on our choices. It can help us tell lies or truth with our mouths. The Creator, of course, designed us with that capacity. Can we learn anything from His example? If Plain leaders could ever figure out a way to ban the God-given electricity in our bodies, they might finally succeed in keeping church members from sinning! *But they would also prevent them from doing any good as well.* They would all suffer from Plain paralysis.

Humans have used their electrically wired brains and bodies to harness and utilize, in a small way, the electricity God created in the natural world, to the great benefit of people all over the globe. There is no biblical reason to live in a house without electricity. There is, however, biblical reason to avoid using electricity for evil.

### **Ordnung Unity?**

Yet another justification for church ordnungs offered by Weaver and Zimmerman is their alleged unifying power:

Church standards are also necessary for unity, because without them there would be major differences among the members that would lead to disunity and confusion. Standards take away some of the confusion of how to dress, what to use and own, enabling the church to be unified (p. 80).

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But the exact opposite is true. Ordnungs cause disharmony, as demonstrated by (1) every Plain person who relocates to a different community to find a more suitable ordnung; (2) all the disagreements, spoken and unspoken, regarding ordnung rules within Plain communities; (3) all the secret disobedience to the ordnung within Plain communities; (4) all the formerly Plain people who have been excommunicated because of ordnung infractions; and (5) all the division between Plain communities across North America. All that division is because of ordnungs. The Amish denomination, in fact, began because of ordnung disagreements with the Swiss Brethren.

There have been many divisions among the Amish since then. In the second half of the 19th century, they divided into Old Order and Amish Mennonites, the latter of whom eventually joined Mennonite groups. Today there are three main Amish subgroups, with significant differences between their ordnungs: Old Order, New Order and Beachy. And there are at least 60 smaller sub-groups. I live within a 30-minute drive of three Old Order communities, and none of them fellowship with each other. In fact, the second one is a split from the first one, and the third is a split from the second one. All the splits were over ordnung issues.

New Testament Christian unity is based on a common love for the Lord Jesus Christ and for everyone who believes in Him. That love is tolerant of other believers who hold to different convictions on nonessentials. That love is “patient” and “bears all things” (1 Cor. 13:4, 7). Paul called that love “the perfect bond of unity” (Col. 3:14). Love attracts, whereas ordnungs repel. Think about it!

# Chapter 10

## Ruling Out Temptations, Part 3

WBP? Chapter 4, pages 81-87

Grasping at more straws in Chapter 4 of *Why Be Plain?* in search of support for Plain doctrines, Weaver and Zimmerman again cite the Jerusalem council recorded in Acts 15, and they again count on the biblical ignorance of their readers to pull the wool over their eyes.

The Jerusalem council was not convened to create a few hundred additional rules beyond the Law of Christ that would be enforced by threat of excommunication, shunning and hellfire—rules that everyone would be required to vow to keep at their baptism and twice every year after. Rather, it was convened to decide whether new Gentile followers of Jesus should be required to be circumcised and keep the Mosaic Law, just like all the Jewish believers at the time.

Readers familiar with Acts 15 will also recall that the Jerusalem council members arrived at their decision by means of the clear revelation of the Holy Spirit (specifically, the evidence that uncircumcised Gentile believers were being baptized in the Holy Spirit), the Word of God, and simple honesty. Moreover, the council determined that Gentile believers did *not* have to become cultural Jews to be saved. Henceforth, they were not obligated to keep hundreds of rules that some Jewish Christians wanted them to keep.

Tragically, Weaver and Zimmerman twist this story about how the early church rejected imposing rules on the first Gentile believers into a story about

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how the apostles established the church's first ordnung! It would be comical if it wasn't so pathetic. Here are their words:

The Plain People follow the examples of the apostles in Acts 15 in making guidelines. Here is a brief summary [in 6 points] of what Acts 15 teaches us.

1.) The apostles didn't assume that the believers would understand all of God's will without guidance from the church [leaders]. People say that church guidelines are unnecessary because the Holy Spirit is a Christian's guide. But the apostles show us that one of the Holy Spirit's ways of giving guidance is through the church leaders. Immature Christians sometimes interpret their own wants and emotions as guidance from the Spirit, but church standards [ordnung rules] stem from careful, prayerful decisions made by a group of mature Christians following the Spirit's guidance (p. 81).

It is certainly true that neither the apostles nor God assumed that new believers would understand all of God's will—as He has revealed it in *His commandments*—without being taught by church leaders. That is why God has placed leaders in the church (see Eph. 4:11–16). But God never gave church leaders responsibility to create new rules beyond the Law of Christ, and such an idea never entered the minds of the Jerusalem council members. They convened to determine if Gentiles were obligated to keep *commandments* that God had given to Jews through Moses.

2.) The church didn't view guidelines as many do today—restrictions on Christian liberty and human attempts to replace the work of the Spirit. Rather, "When they heard, they rejoiced" (v. 31) (p. 81).

What an incredible deception by Weaver and Zimmerman! The Gentile Christians rejoiced *when they learned the council's decision that they didn't have to keep hundreds of Jewish rules*. Weaver and Zimmerman, however, attempt to mislead their readers into thinking that the Gentile believers rejoiced when they learned about their obligation to keep some new man-made ordnung rules!

### **The Council's Caveat**

3.) These guidelines were used as written standards in all the churches (16:4). The result was not legalism, deadness and formalism. Rather, it helped the church to be established and grow (16:5) (p. 81).

Although the Jerusalem council determined that Gentile believers were not obligated to be circumcised and keep all the non-moral Mosaic laws that were not included in the Law of Christ, the council did recommend that they be considerate of Jewish believers by avoiding four things that would be particularly offensive to them. Council member James said:

### *Ruling Out Temptations, Part 3*

Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they [1] abstain from things contaminated by idols and [2] from fornication and [3] from what is strangled and [4] from blood. For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath (Acts 15:19–21).

At that time, for Jews and Gentiles to love one another as brothers and sisters, and to gather together to worship God, was a novel thing that no one would ever have anticipated. (Recall that Peter was confronted by the Jerusalem church leaders just for eating with Gentiles, because the Jews viewed Gentiles as unclean; see Acts 11:1–18). That Jewish-Gentile clash of cultures introduced a few challenges in the early church, challenges that are addressed in some of the New Testament letters (see 1 Cor. 8:1–13; Rom. 14:1–23).

It is, therefore, easy to understand why the Jerusalem council decided to recommend that Gentile believers avoid a few things that were particularly offensive to Jewish believers, even after telling them that they were under no obligation to keep the Mosaic Law. Clearly, all four recommendations were made out of deference to Jews, both Christian and non-Christian, as James said in his concluding statement: “For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath” (Acts 15:21).

It is clear that at least three of the four council recommendations were associated with foods, including the eating of meat that had been sacrificed to idols as part of pagan worship. Most likely, those sacrificed animals were killed by strangulation, rather than by cutting that facilitated draining of blood, as was required under the Mosaic Law.

For this reason, it would seem logical to conclude that the fourth recommended avoidance of “fornication” referred to eating anything associated with the sexual immorality that was practiced in pagan temples as part of the “worship.” No Jew would purchase meat from a pagan temple for all four reasons mentioned in the council’s decision. Certainly, James would not have been referencing “fornication,” in the sense of not engaging in sexual immorality, just to avoid offending Jews. Fornication is a damning sin for everyone, as noted in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10.

To summarize this explanation, James’ recommendation could be paraphrased as follows:

Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them that they [1] abstain from eating things Jewish believers perceive as being contaminated by idols and [2] abstain from eating things Jewish believers perceive as being contaminated by pagan temple fornication and [3] abstain from

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eating what is strangled and [4] abstain from eating anything from which the blood has not been first drained—as those things are forbidden by the Mosaic Law and thus offensive to Jewish believers who are still keeping the Mosaic Law.

It is possible that James's recommendation applied to believing Gentiles only when they were eating a shared meal with Jewish believers. Regardless, the Jerusalem council's decision had nothing to do with creating something that resembled modern Plain ordnungs, and to claim otherwise is grossly dishonest. But that doesn't stop Weaver and Zimmerman from making an illogical analogy. They say, as we already read, "The result [of the council's decision] was not legalism, deadness and formalism. Rather, it helped the church to be established and grow" (16:5). The authors imply that Plain ordnungs also don't result in legalism, deadness and formalism. But in fact they do, as anyone knows who has compared Plain lifestyles and church gatherings with those of Spirit-filled Christians.

The authors also imply that ordnungs "help the church to be established and grow," but in actuality, Plain ordnungs prevent Plain churches from growing (except through having large families). The likely reason why the Jerusalem council's decision helped "the churches [to be] strengthened in the faith, and [increase] in number daily" (Acts 16:5) was because the decision removed barriers that would have hindered Gentiles from believing in Jesus. In contrast, Plain ordnungs—with their hundreds of detailed, non-moral, and often senseless requirements—do the exact opposite, erecting barriers that keep people out.

### **The Cultural Case**

Weaver and Zimmerman next focus on the fact that at least one of the Jerusalem council's recommendations was based on a cultural issue (eating meat sacrificed to idols), and that Paul, who was a member of that council, later wrote that it was not a sin to eat meat sacrificed to idols. So, the authors conclude, this proves that modern church leaders can make rules concerning cultural issues and also forbid what is not biblically sinful. Here are their words.

4.) At least one of the guidelines were [sic] made simply because of their culture at the time. Today we don't have the issue of meat that was sacrificed to idols, but every culture will have its "meat" that the Scriptural church must make guidelines against.

5.) Although the leaders forbade eating such meat, it is interesting that Paul elsewhere wrote that it is not a sin to eat meat sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8:8). Today, many people say the church has no right to make rules against something that isn't sin in itself. But the apostles did! (p. 81).

This illustrates the lengths to which Weaver and Zimmerman twist Scripture to make it fit Plain doctrine. There is no valid comparison between modern

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Plain ordnungs and the decision of the Jerusalem council. In fact, the council's decision stands as an enduring testimony against any church ever establishing an ordnung. How so? Let's consider these comparisons.

The Jerusalem council's decision opened the floodgates for the salvation of outsiders. Modern Plain ordnungs shut the door of salvation to all outsiders as well as most insiders.

The Jerusalem council's decision *eliminated* hundreds of old rules for Gentile Christians. Modern Plain ordnungs *create* hundreds of new rules for everyone.

The Jerusalem council's decision helped to unite two very distinct cultures into one group, in answer to Jesus' prayer that His followers be one, as He and the Father are one (see John 17:21). Modern Plain ordnungs continually spawn division after grievous division, as has been proved by hundreds of years of history.

The Jerusalem council's decision taught a wonderful lesson to all believers that they should love one another (as Jesus commanded; see John 13:35), with a love that takes thought of others and yields its rights. Modern ordnungs teach people to judge everyone else by hundreds of insignificant criteria and to exclude anyone, including even one's family members, if they don't measure up.

Beyond those things, there is certainly no evidence that the Jerusalem council expected their recommendations to Gentile believers to be enforced under threat of excommunication, shunning and hellfire. The exact opposite is true of Plain ordnungs.

So Weaver and Zimmerman's point that "Today we don't have the issue of eat that was sacrificed to idols, but every culture will have its 'meat' that the Scriptural church must make guidelines against," it should be noted that the Jerusalem council did not make guidelines *against* cultural customs; rather, it *yielded* to cultural customs. That's another big difference between modern ordnungs and the Jerusalem council's decision.

As for Weaver and Zimmerman's point that Paul later wrote that it was not a sin to eat meat sacrificed to idols—which allegedly proves that Plain leaders have the right to "make rules against something that isn't sin in itself"—they again twist Paul's words by ignoring their context. Although Paul did write that it was not a sin to eat meat sacrificed to idols, he also wrote in the same passage that doing so could become a sin if it led a fellow believer to stumble. Such an act would be a violation of Jesus' commandment to love fellow believers. Paul wrote:

And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food causes my

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brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble (1 Cor. 8:12–13).

All of this disproves Weaver and Zimmerman’s claim that “Today, many people say the church has no right to makes rules against something that isn’t sin in itself. But the apostles did!” Certainly modern church leaders, like the early church leaders, can offer practical guidance to help believers apply Jesus’ commandment to love each other. But how many of the hundreds of Plain ordnung rules accomplish that?

### **Church Authority**

Weaver and Zimmerman try to capitalize on their readers’ biblical ignorance once more by making a sixth point about the Jerusalem council, one that they hope will persuade their readers to obey without questioning whatever rules their Plain leaders create:

6.) Acts 15 shows that the church leaders are to make the final decision on making standards. The apostles listened to the thoughts of the church (took counsel), but they didn’t decide on the basis of majority vote or democracy. They made the final decision among themselves (v. 6) by discussing the Scriptures, and their decision was the opposite of what some of the church was clamoring for (p. 82).

Why do Weaver and Zimmerman so vaguely describe “what some of the church was clamoring for”? Why don’t they mention that some Jewish Christians were clamoring for an ordnung consisting of hundreds of Jewish rules that “some of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed” (Acts 15:5) wanted to lay on the shoulders of Gentile believers?

Moreover, why don’t they discuss Peter’s question to the council, “Why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples *a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?*” (Acts 15:10, emphasis added). Might the authors be afraid that their readers will realize that the outcome of the Jerusalem council was not the *establishment* of new rules but the *elimination* of hundreds of extra rules not included in the Law of Christ?

Weaver and Zimmerman next attempt to drive home their sixth point with a biblical quotation followed by more twisted logic:

*Hebrews 13:17, “Obey them that have rule over you, and submit yourselves.”* If the ministry has no right to make and enforce guidelines not specifically mentioned in the Bible, what’s to submit to? This verse seems to be referring to more than just what the Bible spells out (p. 82).

No historic or modern Christian leaders, besides Plain leaders, have ever thought that Hebrews 13:17 instructs them to make and enforce rules not specifically mentioned in the Bible. No, godly leaders say to themselves,

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“Jesus commanded me to make disciples, teaching them to obey all that He commanded, and only if I do that should anyone submit to me.”

The correct answer to Weaver and Zimmerman’s question (“If the ministry has no right to make and enforce guidelines not specifically mentioned in the Bible, what’s to submit to?”) is obvious: *the commandments of Christ*, which all true Christian leaders are teaching their disciples to obey. How much simpler could it be?

The authors’ claim that “This verse seems to be referring to more than just what the Bible spells out” has no logical or scriptural basis, and so they resort to quoting a turn-of-the-century Mennonite evangelist named George R. Brunk, whose logic is equally irrational to theirs.

Brunk declares that Christians are supposed to obey God, Scripture, church leaders, parents and magistrates (all true), and that because parents and civil magistrates have the right to make rules not expressly mentioned in the Bible, so must church leaders! That is another non sequitur. We might as well conclude that because children should obey both their parents and police, police have the right to determine what vegetables children should eat and what time they should go to bed!

With that kind of logic to buttress their point, Weaver and Zimmerman double down with a bold declaration that God expects Plain church members to unquestionably obey their leaders and the hundreds of rules they create to regulate every detail of their lives:

It may seem like a minor thing to overstep a church guideline [enforced, man-made rule]. But is it? Since the Bible commands us to obey the ministry and since God gave them their authority over the lay members, any act of disobedience against a Scriptural ministry is an act of disobedience against God. If we are not submitting to the church let us not fool ourselves into thinking we’re submitting to God (p. 83).

That same rhetoric has been employed by the leaders of every cult-like authoritarian religious group that has ever existed. “If you disobey me, you are disobeying God.”

I am reminded of the famous words of Lord Acton: “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” I am also reminded of Peter’s words to the church leaders of his time:

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; *nor yet as lording it over those allotted to*

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*your charge*, but proving to be examples to the flock (1 Pet. 5:1–3, emphasis added).

And I am reminded of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples, whose feet He washed:

You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all (Mark 10:42-44).

As for the authors' point that "Any act of disobedience against a Scriptural ministry is an act of disobedience against God" I respond, "*Any ministry that thinks it has the right to create and enforce hundreds of extra-biblical rules is not a scriptural ministry, and it should never be obeyed.*"

### **Car Ownership**

Next, the authors tackle the subject of car ownership, something that has caused many outsiders to scratch their heads and ask, "Why do Plain people still drive small, fragile horse-drawn buggies, by which they risk their lives on the highways, subject themselves to rain, snow and cold, and dramatically increase their travel times?"

Outsiders scratch their heads even more when they learn that most Plain people regularly pay for taxi services. "They pay others to drive them in cars, but they think it's wrong to own or drive a car?"

If outsiders were to read *Why Be Plain?* they'd be scratching their heads even more, because Weaver and Zimmerman declare that (as we have previously read) "modern technology" and "the world's gadgets" are among "the high things of the world" that are an "abomination to God" (p. 9). So Plain people frequently pay non-Plain people to transport them in vehicles that are an abomination to God. In effect, they are saying, "If we owned and drove a car, it would be a sin. So to avoid that, we pay others who own cars to drive us where we want to go." It is amazing that Weaver and Zimmerman (and all Plain people) can't see the hypocrisy in that. But here is the start of their "explanation":

One of the biggest dividing lines between the Plain Churches and other conservative churches is car ownership. While the Plain People understand that the car in itself isn't evil [even though Weaver and Zimmerman previously described modern technology as among "the high things of the world" that is an "abomination" to God?], they also know that the overall influence of the car is not good for the church, tending to make individuals more independent of each other. It causes the church to lose some of its brotherhood and community spirit (p. 84).

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The authors don't explain exactly how cars actually make "individuals more independent of each other" or "cause the church to lose some of its brotherhood and community spirit." Cars, just like horses and buggies, are just a means of transportation. Cars, however, greatly reduce travel time, so if car owners desire, they can use that advantage to interact more with others to increase "community spirit." If they desire, they can go to more church gatherings each week or stay longer. Or they can also leave their car parked and stay home, just as Plain people can do with their horse-drawn buggies.

In any case, Weaver and Zimmerman's claims are questionable. But they continue, "Cars are expensive to operate, come in the line of luxury, and lead to a higher, more worldly lifestyle" (p. 84).

Guess what? *Cars are actually more expensive to operate when you have to pay for a driver.* When a Plain person utilizes an "English" taxi, all the costs of ownership, maintenance, insurance, depreciation, and fuel are passed on to the customer, plus the time of the driver, plus some profit. Plain people have *that* expense, *plus* the expense of owning and maintaining a horse and buggy. I suspect that many Plain people spend more money on transportation than do non-Plain people. As I explained previously, that was the case for my friend and former Amish minister, Jonas Kurtz.

#### **The Evolution of Ordnungs on Cars**

Cars were a luxury when they first appeared in the late 1800s, back when everyone was using literal horsepower. But that perception began to change in 1908 with the production of the Model T Ford, the first mass-produced car that most people could afford. Today, with an estimated 1.64 billion cars in operation, they are no longer a luxury. For most people in developed societies, they are necessities.

I strongly suspect that when cars first were seen on the road, they were denounced as worldly by Plain preachers. I suspect that even riding in one was forbidden in most ordnungs. But today, different Plain groups have adopted different stances. Most allow hiring an English taxi. Some Plain groups have allowed their members to own a vehicle, but not to drive one. Some permit men to drive vehicles for their employers. Some allow members to transport their families on wagons pulled behind a tractor, driving what amounts to a slow, open-air car. And some Plain groups have allowed both ownership and driving of cars but have restricted certain accessories. Today, many Plain people do what would have sent their great-grandparents to hell. What once was "worldly" is no longer "worldly." Does that teach us anything?

Of course, buggies could be considered a luxury by people whose only means of transportation is walking. How would Weaver and Zimmerman respond if a poor man in Africa denounced them, saying that "the overall influence of

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horse-drawn buggies is not good for the church, because they tend to make individuals more independent of each other, cause the church to lose some of its brotherhood and community spirit, are expensive to own and operate, come in the line of luxury, and lead to a higher, more worldly lifestyle"? I'll bet they would object.

According to Weaver and Zimmerman, people who own cars spend more time on the road than people who drive buggies, because "it becomes easy to run hither and thither for trivial reasons or just for something fun to do. It's now as easy to drive 100 miles as it was to drive 10 and that's exactly what they do" (p. 85). Of course, if that is true, then there is no difference in the amount of time spent between a car owner who drives 100 miles and a buggy owner who drives 10 miles. And car owners don't drive for trivial reasons. Just like buggy owners, they drive to get from one point to another, and they save lots of time in the process. If having an easier and faster means of transportation is a bad thing, why don't Plain people sell their horses and buggies and walk everywhere they go?

Weaver and Zimmerman also claim that car owners "get sucked up in the world's mad dash for everywhere and everything." Once again, this is the "prison rationale." The more restrictions, the less temptation, so let's restrict those who are under our authority as much as possible. Although hundreds of millions of devoted Christians own cars and use them only for good and never for evil, Plain Christians can't be trusted to own a car. They might sin.

### **Oops!**

Realizing that their claims will be rejected by Plain readers whose ordnungs permit car ownership (like Beachy and New Order), Weaver and Zimmerman backpedal to the point of contradicting themselves:

It is not that car ownership is wrong when the church allows it, nor that its owner is always worldly. But the rejection of the car brings a spiritual blessing that can't be denied (p. 85).

That means that if one's church allows car ownership, then it is not wrong and car owners are not necessarily worldly, even though the authors have previously stated that (1) a car is a "high thing of the world" that is an "abomination to God," (2) car ownership "leads to a higher, more worldly lifestyle," and (3) car owners "get sucked up in the world's mad dash for everywhere and everything"! Does any of that sound contradictory?

And what, exactly, is the "spiritual blessing that can't be denied" that accompanies "the rejection of the car"? It certainly isn't a physical blessing, as anyone who has ridden in a buggy in the rain or bitter cold knows. If we could get Weaver and Zimmerman to describe that "spiritual blessing," perhaps they would refer to some inward feeling, relief from self-imposed guilt, or the inward thought, "God, I thank you that I am not like others . . ."

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And if car ownership is not wrong “when the church allows it,” that confirms the authors’ belief that local church leaders have the authority to decide what is right and wrong. That is an idea that some of their Anabaptist ancestors gave their lives to refute.

### **Phones**

As they near the end of chapter 4 of *Why Be Plain?* Weaver and Zimmerman return again to the subject of phones. Of course, every Plain community has its own set of rules regarding phones. Some allow communal pay phone shacks. Some allow personal outdoor or even indoor “black box” phones. Some allow phones only at places of business. Some allow personal phones as long as they aren’t smartphones with internet access. Recently, some began allowing smart phones that include filtering technology to prevent users from viewing pornography. Weaver and Zimmerman lament this “compromise”:

And now it seems that even some Plain Churches are flirting with the possibility of accepting the smartphone. If that happens, the end of being Plain is drawing nigh. To accept the smartphone is to accept what the Plain People have always opposed and considered of the world: the [in-] home phone, TV, camera, radio, movies, computer and the Internet. All of these are conveniently on that small smartphone. There is no way that the Plain People could accept it without losing their values and conservatism. Their rejection of technology is the reason they have been able to remain a separate people. A smartphone would constantly bombard them with the world’s influence, mentality and beliefs. This would be detrimental to the church.

When a person owns a smartphone, the church has no chance of being the main influence in his life. The world will be (p. 87).

That last claim is alarming because Weaver and Zimmerman apparently believe that “the church” should be the main influence in someone’s life. “The church,” of course, is just a substitute phrase for “church leaders.” That again affirms the undue and dominating authority that Plain leaders possess. Why didn’t Weaver and Zimmerman warn that, when one owns a smart phone, *Jesus* has no chance of being the main influence in his life?

In any case, although it is certainly *not* true that owning a smart phone guarantees that the world’s influence will extinguish *Jesus*’ influence (as demonstrated by millions of Christians), it *is* true that owning a smart phone may ultimately nullify the influence of Plain leaders, because the smart phone can give Plain people access to biblical information from outside their “Plain bubbles.” Many former members of Plain churches in which no one, including the ministry, were born again have discovered the truth of the new birth by gaining “forbidden” access to the truth through a smart phone. Tragically, however, when they were born again, they were excommunicated for

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“adopting a new faith.” Those Plain churches don’t realize they are excommunicating the only person in their church in whom Jesus actually lives! They are excommunicating Jesus!

In churches in which no one is born again—which means no one actually loves Jesus and desires to keep His commandments—rules against smart phones might keep some members from owning them, but many secretly own them anyways, and they indulge in the evil that is available through them. But among people who are truly born again and who truly love Jesus and desire to keep His commandments, smart phones are not gateways to the evil of the world. They are simply a multifaceted means of communication. I’ve owned a smart phone for years and it has not caused the world to become the main influence in my life, as is also the case with millions of other Christians. We are living our lives for Jesus.

Apparently, either Weaver and Zimmerman don’t realize that users control what they see on their smart phones, or they assume that no one can resist the temptations offered by smart phones. They write, “A smartphone would constantly bombard them with the world’s influence, mentality and beliefs” (p. 87). Millions of Christ-followers who own smart phones would disagree, because they control what they see with their smart phones and use them only for good. In fact, some of us use smart phones and other modern technology to teach the Bible and preach the gospel.

But Weaver and Zimmerman even object to that, asking, “Should we actually offer someone a drink of the Gospel in a cup used to measure the devil’s poison? Should we really tell others about Christ through the same device that has caused millions—and that includes professing Christians—to sin against Christ?” (p. 87).

That is an interesting statement from people who admit that they and their entire group don’t spread the gospel as other churches do (see Chapter 7 of *Why Be Plain?*). And their description of a smart phone as “a cup used to measure the devil’s poison” shows how skewed a view they have. I view my smart phone as simply a communication tool that I am blessed to own. I often read the Bible on my smart phone. I have edifying conversations on it, sharing biblical truth and encouragement with others. I often take photos of my grandchildren or of beautiful scenery God has created. I use it to guide me to unfamiliar destinations, to check the weather forecast, to learn recent news from trusted sources, and to monitor my health. I use it to sell items I no longer need to people in my community. And I use it in many ways for my ministry.

Finally, if we apply Weaver and Zimmerman’s logic that the gospel shouldn’t be preached through things that are often used for evil, we would have to conclude that the gospel shouldn’t be preached through human mouths (see Jas. 3:1–12)!

# Chapter 11

## Ruling Out Temptations, Part 4

WBP? Chapter 4, pages 88-93

Weaver and Zimmerman ask their readers:

If Jesus were on the earth today, would He own the world's leading technology? Would He dress like them? Would He join them in their boisterous entertainment and sensual pleasures? Would He spend a lot of time in front of screens? (p. 88).

Those are misleading questions on several levels. First, in a list of four behaviors, the authors include one (sensual pleasures) that nearly all readers would agree is wrong. But are the other three behaviors guilty by association, just because they are in the same list?

Second, even the one behavior that most readers would agree is wrong is described vaguely, so that readers are left to question what is meant. Does "sensual" mean "sexual" or "arouses God-given senses in a harmless way"? Does "boisterous" mean "drunkenly wild" or "enthusiastically happy"? And what do the authors mean by "dressing like the world"? Do they mean "walk around half-naked" or "wear clothing that didn't make Him stand out, as Plain clothing does"?

Regardless, in one sense Jesus *is* on the earth today. Through His Holy Spirit, He's living inside everyone who believes in Him—all of whom can say, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Countless millions of these Christ-indwelt people own smart phones and cars. I am one of them.

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Are none of those people actually Christians? Does Jesus actually live only in people who don't own smart phones or cars?

Weaver and Zimmerman ask whether Jesus would "dress like the world." I'll answer that question with another question: "Would Jesus only wear dark-colored trousers, dark leather shoes, a shirt and suspenders, and a straw hat with a three-inch brim, and shave off His mustache?" There is no evidence in the New Testament that Jesus dressed any different from those around Him during His earthly ministry. So yes, Jesus dressed like the world.

Of course, Jesus would not engage in immoral sensual pleasures, but if Weaver and Zimmerman are referring to things we enjoy daily through our five God-given senses, why would Jesus have denied Himself those things? God created our senses and everything in the physical world that we perceive.

Similarly, Jesus would not have patronized the gladiator battles in Roman arenas, but millions of Christians enjoy sports contests, and no New Testament verse would discourage us from participating in them. Weaver and Zimmerman would be hard pressed to find a single verse in the Bible that condemns what has always been a part of every culture. Even the apostle Paul used analogies from sports contests in his letters to the churches, and without a hint of condemnation (see 1 Cor. 9:24–27; 2 Tim. 2:5).

### **Would Jesus Ride in a Taxi?**

The authors continue:

[Jesus] lived plainly and simply and warned that the world's possessions and ways lead away from God. He did not ride around in chariots, the fastest means of transportation at the time. He walked or rode a donkey, the slowest means of transportation. He did not attend the places of worldly entertainment such as the arena. He said that those who would be His disciples must forsake the world's pleasures. He did not dress in fancy clothes. As one fulfilling the law He must have worn the simple, regulated garb as commanded by God in the OT (p. 88).

This entire paragraph is also misleading on several levels.

Generally speaking, Jesus lived like just everyone else in His culture, His region, and His time. For the most part, everyone in Galilee lived simply—because there were no other options. No one in Galilee could have afforded a chariot. Chariots would have been reserved for government officials and perhaps ranking soldiers. *But Jesus used every means of transportation that everyone else did.* He walked, rode a donkey at least once, and crossed the Sea of Galilee in a boat. He didn't live at a standard below His culture. And every Plain reader would have to agree that, if Jesus was physically walking on the earth today, He would not hesitate to ride in an English taxi, right? Of course, because Plain ordnungs allow that!

## *Ruling Out Temptations, Part 4*

The authors' claim that Jesus "warned that the world's possessions and ways lead away from God" is also misleading. Jesus warned only about the world's *sinful* ways, that is, behaviors that transgressed God's commandments. Just because the world uses toothbrushes, for example, doesn't make it wrong for me to use a toothbrush.

Jesus did have plenty to say regarding wealth and possessions, but He never forbade any specific material item. He never told anyone their house was too big or their field was too large. On the other hand, He twice miraculously blessed His disciples with boatloads of fish. On the first occasion, He filled two boats with so much fish that both were sinking (see Luke 5:7). The second time, His disciples "were not able to haul [their net] in because of the great number of fish" (John 21:6). When they dragged their full net to the shore, they counted 153 *large* fish, and the disciples were astonished that their net had not been torn.

Jesus did these miracles for fishermen. He blessed their businesses. But He blessed them to be a blessing. In each case, He gave them much more than they needed. So they had the option of using their extra blessing to serve the poor, which is what Jesus expected and presumably what they did. These same disciples had twice watched Jesus multiply fish to feed thousands of hungry people. And both times, there were fish left over.

### **The "World's Possessions"**

When Weaver and Zimmerman refer to "the world's possessions," they are referring to modern technology and, of course, *only* to the modern technology that Plain people shun, not all the modern technology that Plain ordnungs allow. Jesus, however, never referred to "the world's possessions." The only time "the world's possessions" (or "the world's goods") are mentioned in the New Testament is in 1 John 3:17. And as we know, there was no modern technology in the first century. So John must have been referring to something else. It is therefore misleading for Weaver and Zimmerman to use a biblical phrase to mean something that it could not have meant in the Bible.

As noted previously, John neither stated nor implied that it was wrong for believers to possess "the world's goods." He assumed that some believers *did* possess them, which is why he told them to share them with those in need. Clearly, John did not refer to them as "the world's goods" because they were inherently evil, but for some other reason—perhaps because the world has no "heavenly treasure" but only "earthly treasures" (a biblical topic we will explore shortly).

Similarly, when Weaver and Zimmerman say Jesus "said that those who would be His disciples must forsake the world's pleasures," they are referring to what Plain ordnungs, and not the Bible, often define as such. Jesus mentioned "the world's pleasures" one time, in His parable of the sower and

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soils. He warned there that “the worries and riches and *pleasures* of this life” can choke the influence of the gospel in people’s hearts so that they bear no fruit (see Luke 8:14).

What kind of pleasures was Jesus warning about? Obviously, not all pleasures are wrong or evil, as some human pleasures find their origin in God, who Himself is repeatedly described in Scripture as one who “takes pleasure” in various things (see Ps. 149:4; Is. 46:10; 48:14; 53:10; Phil. 2:13; Col. 2:19). Was Jesus warning about the pleasure of eating a crisp, sweet apple, or of catching a large fish (or 153 large fish)? Obviously not. He was warning about “the passing pleasures of sin” (Heb. 12:25). The world “takes *pleasure* in wickedness” (2 Thess. 2:12). So there are legitimate and illegitimate pleasures. We need to go the Bible, not the *ordnung*, to know which pleasures are actually sinful. One formerly Amish Christian woman told me that when she was a young girl, she asked her mother how people sinned in Bible times before there were telephones, radios, and cars. Obviously, those *ordnung*-restricted things were the main sins her church talked about!

As for the authors’ claim that Jesus “did not dress in fancy clothes,” that is likely true. Like most everyone else in His culture, He wore an outward tunic and an inward garment (according to John 19:23–24), both of which would have been draped around Him. But neither did Jesus dress like a modern Plain person, so if He is our example to follow, why don’t Plain people say we must dress like Him? If I asked any Plain person that question, I suspect they would answer that Jesus lived at a different time and in a different culture. That would be an admission that time and culture should be considered as we apply Scripture to ourselves.

In Jesus’ time, cloth was woven by hand and was thus relatively expensive, and most people in Jesus’ day and region were quite poor by modern standards. So most people in Galilee would have owned no more than a few garments. Jesus’ disciples apparently owned at least two tunics each (see Mark 6:9; Luke 9:3), so Jesus probably did as well. Some people were so poor that John the Baptist told his audience, “The man who has two tunics is to share with him who has none” (Luke 3:11).

As for the authors’ statement that “As one fulfilling the law [Jesus] must have worn the simple, regulated garb as commanded by God in the OT,” there is no basis for that claim, which is probably why Weaver and Zimmerman offer no biblical reference for it. The only two requirements regarding clothing style in the Mosaic Law were a prohibition against blended cloth (see Lev. 19:19; Deut. 22:9–11) and a requirement that men’s garments should have tassels on each corner—a reminder of God’s commandments (see Num. 15:37–40). Jesus, no doubt, wore tassels on His garments all of His life.

If any Plain person were to add tassels hanging from the corners of his clothing, those tassels would be considered “fancy,” and that person would prob-

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ably be placed under the bann until he repented. By the way, God required priests under the Mosaic Law to wear very fancy clothing—all designed by God “for glory and for beauty”—as described in Exodus 28. Moreover, there are no uniform specifications or requirements in the New Testament. Ordning rules regarding clothing are entirely unbiblical.

### **A Biblical View of Money and Possessions**

I was happy to see Weaver and Zimmerman address, in the final pages of chapter 4, the issue of money and material possessions. This topic is too often ignored or neglected in Christian circles. Much of what they say about it is true. Yet they definitely lack balance. For example, they write:

Jesus warned often about the snare of possessions, even saying that it is almost impossible for a rich man to be saved. How can that be? Possessions are not evil. In fact, we say they are a gift from God. But Jesus knew that treasures on earth will turn our hearts away from Him. This shows that He doesn't want us to freely possess just anything. He taught us to only own those things that are necessary. Most technology isn't necessary, and tends to be a temptation and snare. Just like the rest of the world's possessions, the more we own the harder it is to keep our hearts in heaven (p. 90).

That paragraph contains some truth, but it falls short—as does much of the authors' teaching on the subject of material possessions—of painting a full biblical picture.

The reason why it is “hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:23) was illustrated by Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler. Jesus told Him to liquidate his wealth and give to the poor. By so doing, he would “lay up treasure in heaven.” But the rich ruler, like many other wealthy people, was unwilling to part with any of his wealth for the benefit of the poor.

Jesus told *all* His followers, during His Sermon on the Mount, to similarly lay treasure up in heaven:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matt. 6:19–21).

Many, like Weaver and Zimmerman, seem to focus on just half of that commandment. Jesus didn't just say, “Don't store up treasures on earth,” as if there is some virtue in being poor. Rather, Jesus said, “Don't store up treasures on earth, but store them up in heaven.” That is a single commandment that consists of two steps. That commandment is obeyed, according to Jesus,

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by caring for the poor (see Matt. 19:21; Luke 12:33). Those who obey both parts of that single commandment show that their hearts are in heaven rather than on earth. And they haven't lost any wealth in the process. Rather, they have secured it eternally.

So one could say that every Christian has two piles of treasure, one on earth and one in heaven. The goal of wise Christians is to make their heavenly pile as large as possible in proportion to the earthly pile that God entrusts to them. Jesus' words about the widow who gave two copper coins (see Luke 21:1-4) are an excellent illustration of God's view of who the greatest givers are. Those whom God has given the opportunity to gain a large earthly pile should remember that "from everyone who has been given much, much will be required" (Luke 12:48). This also means that gaining earthly wealth can be virtuous if the goal is to lay up as much heavenly treasure as possible.

In an earlier chapter I mentioned the biblical character Job, whom God considered the most righteous man on earth at the time. He had a very big pile of treasure on earth, owning 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 oxen, 500 female donkeys, and very many servants who took care of all that livestock (see Job 1:3). He not only provided opportunities for his workers to earn an income, but he also used his profits to care for the poor. In doing so, he laid up a big pile of treasure in heaven.

I don't know why Jesus told the rich young ruler to sell all his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor rather than telling him to use his wealth to gain income that he could then *continually* give to the poor. Perhaps it was because Jesus was also calling the young man to "follow Him" in a literal sense, something that would have been impossible if he would have had to maintain all his assets. In any case, Weaver and Zimmerman, in the above-quoted paragraph, don't focus on the second half of Jesus' commandment. Let's again read what they focus on:

But Jesus knew that treasures on earth will turn our hearts away from Him. This shows that He doesn't want us to freely possess just anything. He taught us to only own those things that are necessary. Most technology isn't necessary, and tends to be a temptation and snare. Just like the rest of the world's possessions, the more we own the harder it is to keep our hearts in heaven.

They don't say a word about laying up heavenly treasure or caring for the poor. Again, there is no virtue, in itself, in owning less. There is virtue, however, in owning less in order to care for the poor, and particularly those whom Jesus referred to as "the least of these" (see Matt. 25:31-46). That involves "denying oneself."

Think about it from this standpoint: If every person in the world were a millionaire, there would be no need (or opportunity) to share with the poor. So

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there would be nothing wrong with being a millionaire, or even a millionaire who didn't share his wealth. But God looks at people's wealth in light of those who are suffering lack through no fault of their own, as is illustrated in Jesus' story of the rich man and Lazarus. He thus expects those to whom He has entrusted wealth to be generous and care for the poor.

The authors' claim that "Jesus knew that treasures on earth will turn our hearts away from Him" is not actually true, and Job and many other biblical characters are proof of that. Earthly wealth will turn our hearts away from Jesus only if we foolishly allow it to do so. As David (a very wealthy man) wrote, "If riches increase, do not set your heart upon them" (Ps. 62:10). Earthly wealth can help us demonstrate our love for God as we obey Him in how we use it.

Weaver and Zimmerman, in the paragraph quoted above, focus on "drawing a line" regarding what and how much one can own. That is exactly what ordnungs do. Those standards are *arbitrarily* set by Plain leaders, depending on what they think is "necessary"—which, according to Weaver and Zimmerman, does not include most technology. But as we have seen, technology is normally used for good purposes. It is often used to create more earthly wealth, which then allows its possessors to help more poor people and also lay up treasure in heaven.

Many Plain ordnungs, however, hinder that process, which is why successful Plain businessmen often gravitate away from Plain communities that limit their business success. I've seen it firsthand. I know of one Plain community that clearly and calculatingly drove away all the families who owned successful businesses, and I wonder if the reason was jealousy among the leadership.

In any case, it is foolish to set arbitrary rules regarding how much one can earn and own. Jesus didn't do that. Neither did any of the apostles who wrote New Testament letters. They followed and imitated Jesus' teaching. For example, Paul wrote to Timothy:

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, *who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy*. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed (1 Tim. 6:17–19, emphasis added).

Paul listed no ordnung rules regarding what rich believers could and could not own. He only told them to be generous as they laid up heavenly treasure. He also declared that God "richly supplies us with all things to enjoy." That doesn't sound like a condemnation of enjoying what God "richly supplies."

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Having traveled throughout much of Africa, Latin America, and Asia, I can assure you that 99% of the people who live in North America, including most all Plain people, are wealthy in comparison to most other citizens of the world. If being wealthy is a sure ticket to hell, we're all headed there, along with Job (Job 1:1–2), Abraham (Gen. 13:2; 24:35), Isaac (Gen. 26:12–15), Jacob (Gen. 30:43), David (1 Chron. 22:14; 29:28), the Roman centurion who believed (Luke 7:2–4), Joseph of Arimathea (Matt. 27:57–60), some of Jesus' female followers (Luke 8:3), Joseph called Barnabas (Acts 4:36–37), the rich Christians of whom Paul wrote in his first letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 6:17), and the Christians whom John mentioned as owning some of the world's goods (1 John 3:17). I think it is safe to assume that all of them laid up some treasure in heaven.

### **The Poverty of Persecution**

The author of the book of Hebrews wrote to some very poor Jewish believers whose material possessions had been confiscated by their persecutors (a trial also suffered by the early Anabaptists). He reminded them that they had “accepted joyfully the seizure of [their] property, knowing that [they] have for [themselves] a better possession and a lasting one” (Heb. 10:34). To those same suffering Jewish believers, he also wrote:

Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, “I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you” (Heb. 13:5).<sup>10</sup>

That warning had nothing to do with trying to become wealthy or wealthier. The entire letter to the Hebrews was written to encourage Jewish believers not to abandon their faith in Jesus, as they were being tempted to do by their still-Jewish families who were urging them to return to Judaism. They had been severely shunned, and their faith was being tested. They could regain their former property if they would only renounce Jesus. But if they did, it would reveal that the love of money had overcome their love of God.<sup>11</sup>

In such cases, persecuted Christians should, of course, be content with what they still have. But that doesn't mean that believers who have the opportunity to increase their wealth by using their God-given brains, muscles and opportunities, and who share some of that wealth with the “least of these” (which would certainly include persecuted Christians whose property had been seized), are somehow sinning or not content. Most Plain people live in

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<sup>10</sup> This same Scripture passage is quoted by the authors near the end of chapter 4 of *Why Be Plain?*

<sup>11</sup> Tragically, I have observed the same phenomenon in some unregenerate Plain circles when someone is born again and is consequently excommunicated and shunned. Some are told by parents that they are now disinherited, a cruel attempt to pull them back into their spiritually dead religion. Thankfully, most who suffer such treated prove that they love Jesus more than any potential inheritance.

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the United States, the “land of opportunity,” and with their hard work and many skills, they can create plenty of wealth that they can then share. Indeed, many of them do share with those who have no similar opportunity.

Paul similarly wrote to Timothy about

men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Tim. 6:5–10).<sup>12</sup>

Again, Paul listed no ordnung rules that legislated what believers could and could not own. He declared only that Christians should be content even if all they have is food and covering, and that they should guard against the love of money, because the love of money leads to “all sorts of evil.” That is, the love of money leads to all kinds of sins involving how money is gained and used. One might commit theft or engage in some form of deception, both transgressions against the second-greatest commandment, in order to gain money. Or he might neglect caring for the poor, another transgression against the second-greatest commandment.

Paul was certainly not implying that poor Christians who have only food and covering should not work to gain more if they have the opportunity, as he wrote to the Ephesian Christians: “He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need” (Eph. 4:28).

All this harmonizes with Jesus’ teaching about laying up heavenly rather than earthly treasures. The more earthly treasures one gains, the more treasure he can lay up in heaven. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodists, used to teach about money, “Make all you can. Save all you can [that is, be frugal]. Give all you can.” Who can argue with that?

### **Technology Blindness**

Weaver and Zimmerman next defend an inconsistency they know outsiders sometimes criticize:

Someone looking for inconsistencies among the Plain People may point out things like, “You criticize the use of modern technology. Yet you go to the doctor and benefit greatly from it. Almost everything you own was produced with the aid of technology.”

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<sup>12</sup> This passage is cited again near the end of Chapter 4 of *Why Be Plain?*

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That is true. But there is a big difference between benefitting from technology versus owning it. The Plain People do not believe that technology in itself is evil. Rather, they recognize that owning it brings great temptations for evil. Just like they ride in a car, but don't want the influence of owning one, they can benefit from technology while still avoiding the snares and pitfalls associated with owning it (p. 90).

Contrary to the authors' claim that only those who are "looking for inconsistencies among the Plain People" find them, *everyone* who interacts with Plain people soon wonders about their inconsistencies. And everyone who hears their explanations, like the one Weaver and Zimmerman offer here, wonders even more. Plain people, who don't own cars, pay to benefit from the cars that others own, which helps enable those car owners to own their cars, which Plain people say is wrong! So do Plain people avoid sinning by enabling and encouraging others to sin?

### **The World's Tools**

Not only do Weaver and Zimmerman assign an unbiblical meaning to the biblical phrase "the world's goods" (1 John 3:17), but they invent a similar phrase, "the world's *tools*," to load more unwarranted guilt on their readers and justify the arbitrary rules found in Plain ordnungs:

The big underlying problem that causes us to want more of the world's comforts and ease is that we are looking for Heaven on earth. We want things to be perfect. We try to take away God's curse on sinful man, that by the sweat of his brow shall he make a living. Too often we'd rather let big machinery or some other technology do the work instead of working with our hands as the Bible commands. And thus we bend the church rules and covet the world's tools.

We need to stop and consider who we are and where we're going. We're supposed to be pilgrims and strangers on earth, heading for a better land, a heavenly kingdom. Too much ease and comforts will blur that vision, causing us to be content with the world instead of striving for Heaven (p. 91).

The underlying premise in the above paragraphs seems to be that it is wrong to desire what makes life easier or more comfortable (an idea I have previously addressed) because it will blur our vision of heaven, and thus modern technology that makes life easier is wrong.

On what biblical basis do the authors make their claim? They cite God's original curse on the ground so that it would grow "both thorns and thistles" for Adam who would thus "eat bread" by the "sweat of his brow" (Gen. 3:18-19).

So do Plain people, not wanting to make their lives easier and thus blur their

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vision of heaven, never cover their pre-planted gardens with plastic tarp or mulch in an attempt to thwart God's curse of thorns and thistles?

Do they not pull emerging thorn and thistle seedlings from their gardens in the spring, lest they uproot what might have caused them to sweat had they allowed the thorns to grow larger?

Under God's curse of increased discomfort in childbirth, do Plain women do nothing to make their deliveries easier and more comfortable, lest they subvert God's curse in any way? Do Plain ordnungs limit the number of aspirin Plain women are allowed to swallow during childbirth?

In actuality, Plain people, like everyone else, do all kinds of things that make their lives easier and more comfortable and that might (according to Weaver and Zimmerman's account) blur their vision of heaven.

Although the authors rightly say that we should be "striving for Heaven," for some reason it is wrong to desire any taste of "Heaven on earth" by using tools that make our lives easier or more comfortable. If that were true, however, we should not use *any* tools. We should literally only "work with our hands." But Weaver and Zimmerman create a category of tools they call "the world's tools," an arbitrary designation that varies from one Plain community to the other. That means some Plain people are using what other Plain communities consider "the world's tools." Weaver and Zimmerman ought to rename them "the world's and some Plain communities' tools."

As I pointed out early in this book, Plain people frequently use plenty of relatively modern technology that makes their lives easier and more comfortable. When they use chain saws, for example, they use modern technology to "work with their hands," just as I am using modern technology to work with my hands right now as I type these words on my laptop computer. Chain saws make tree cutting much easier and efficient, and laptops make writing much easier and more efficient. But most Plain people claim the latter is worldly and the former is not.

I would invite you to visit a large Amish lumber yard where heavy logs, before being sawn in a mechanized sawmill, are moved using a huge articulating front-end log grapppler. The driver in the operator's cabin is "working with his hands" while using a modern machine often worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. But at the end of the day, the owner of that lumberyard and grapppler will drive home in a horse-drawn buggy to (1) please the Lord, (2) avoid owning "the world's goods," and (3) comply with the ordnung. Is it any wonder why outsiders scratch their heads when they observe Plain people?

In this same section of chapter 4, Plain ordnungs are again elevated to equal status with God's commandments. The authors warn:

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At times it might be *tempting* to sidestep the *guidelines* to make life easier. *But the true Christian who loves God does not give in to this temptation* (p. 91, emphasis mine).

“True” Christians, like Weaver and Zimmerman who once more deceptively refer to strictly enforced rules as “guidelines,” surely wouldn’t sidestep ordnung rules to make their lives easier! It seems, however, that their ordnung allowed them to type their self-published book manuscript on a computer before it was mass-printed on a mechanized printing press. Didn’t that computer and printing press make their lives a little easier?

# Chapter 12

## Ruling Out Temptations, Part 5

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Most people know that the spectrum of belief and practice within Christendom is very broad. People who identify as Christians comprise almost one-third of the world's population. That amounts to about 2.4 billion professing Christians. They can be divided into three major categories: Catholic (49%), Protestant (40%), and Orthodox (11%).

Among the Protestants, there are many subgroups, one of which is the Anabaptists. They represent slightly more than 2 million of Protestantism's 960 million people. They live in 86 nations.

Anabaptists are divided into more than 300 subgroups, including Mennonites, Hutterites, Schwarzenau Brethren, River Brethren, Apostolic Christian, and of course Amish.

Most Amish people live in North America, with about 395,000 in the U.S. and 6,000 in Canada (as of 2025). They represent about 19% of all Anabaptists, but only .017% of all people who identify as Christians. So if you had 6,000 pennies that represented all of the world's professing Christians, only 1 of them would be Amish.

There are literally tens of thousands of distinct Christian groups. All of them hold to beliefs and practices that are based upon a combination of biblical revelation, fallible reasoning, and human tradition, and each group possesses different percentages of all three.

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New groups are often spawned from old groups because of the desire to follow more biblical revelation and less human tradition. That is the story of the Protestant Reformation, which broke away from Catholicism. That is the story of the Anabaptists, who were made unwelcome among the Protestants and who initiated their own “Radical Reformation.” That is also the story of the Amish, whose founder and namesake, Jakob Ammann, felt that the Swiss Brethren had drifted from certain biblical convictions and practices.

There have been many divisions among the Amish since then. In the second half of the 19th century, they divided into Old Order and Amish Mennonites, the latter of whom eventually joined Mennonite groups.

Today there are three main Amish subgroups that all have significant differences in their ordnungs: Old Order, New Order and Beachy. And there are at least 60 smaller sub-groups. As I mentioned earlier, I live within a 30-minute drive of three Old Order communities, and none of them fellowship with each other. In fact, the second one is a split from the first one, and third one is a split from the second one. All the splits were over ordnung issues.

Generally speaking, many if not most of the members of Christianity’s tens of thousands of distinct groups think that their group is the best, based on some criteria. The potential for pride is real, and all of us should stop and ponder how silly it is to imagine that God is most pleased with our group among the tens of thousands of other Christian groups who hold to different variations of belief and practice.

We also can’t help but mourn for all the division that exists among 2.4 billion people who all claim to believe in the One who prayed, “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:20–21), and who also told His followers, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (John 13:34).

We are not doing a very good job of obeying Jesus’ new commandment, or of being the answer to His prayer that we should be one. We should ask ourselves if the things we consider worth dividing over are equally as important to Jesus. All true Christians could find common ground more readily if we focused on obeying the clear commandments of the Son of God and mutually respecting our different convictions in matters where His will is not as clear.

That, in fact, is exactly what the New Testament instructs Christians to do. Not every Christian in the apostolic church agreed on every detail of what Christians should and shouldn’t do. We have already studied the early church’s first internal dispute, regarding Gentile believers’ relationship to the Mosaic Law. Although the Jewish believers were generally following the

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Law of Moses, they eventually agreed that Gentile believers were not obligated to be circumcised or to keep any of the Mosaic Law's rules that were not contained in the law of Christ. They did, however, request that Gentile believers avoid a few practices that would be particularly offensive to Jews, at least when in their presence. It was a compromise of love on their part.

### **A Closer Look**

Two passages in Paul's letters focus on the issue of differing convictions among Christians. They are found in Romans 14:1–15:12 and 1 Corinthians 8–10. The message Paul conveys in both passages is that Christians of differing convictions should love one another, which requires them to respect one another, not judge one another, not cause a fellow believer to stumble, and compromise to some degree. Not surprisingly, however, Weaver and Zimmerman painfully twist Paul's instructions into a justification for ordnungs:

In Romans 14 we read of how Christian liberty should be limited by Christian love, meaning we should set boundaries for ourselves so that we don't knowingly offend our brothers and sisters in Christ. If we insist on owning something or doing something that offends another church member, we're not walking charitably, or in other words, not according to Christ's will.

Since we cannot serve two masters, it's self-evident that a true Christian will limit himself, and the Scriptural church will set standards to avoid offenses and stumbling blocks (p. 90).

To paraphrase the authors, all church members should obey all ordnung rules lest they offend other ordnung-keeping church members or cause them to stumble. But that is a gross twisting of what Paul actually taught.

First, the early church had nothing that remotely resembled modern Plain ordnungs consisting of hundreds of extra-biblical rules that govern even the smallest details of life.

Second, the very idea of ordnungs flatly contradicts the very principle of loving one another in spite of differing convictions. Ordnungs establish hundreds of standards to which everyone must conform. If people don't conform to these rules, they are disciplined, and if they still don't conform, they are excommunicated and shunned. *That is the exact opposite of what Paul taught in Romans 14–15 and 1 Corinthians 8–10!*

### **Romans 14**

Let's consider both passages so that all readers can plainly see this for themselves. We will start with Romans 14:1–4:

Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One person has faith that he may eat all

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things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

One example of differing convictions in the early church revolved around eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. Some believers avoided eating any meat because of the possibility that it might have been sacrificed to pagan idols. To them, eating such meat constituted participating in idolatry. So they became “vegetarians for Jesus.” Paul referred to this group as “weak in their faith,” but we can admire them for their desire to avoid any hint of idolatry and thus not offend the Lord. Other believers (like Paul) had no such convictions. They didn’t believe eating meat, even if it had been sacrificed to idols, was sinful or offensive to the Lord.

Notice that Paul didn’t create an ordnung rule to which everyone must conform. Doing so would have contradicted his instructions for each group to respect the convictions of the other group and not judge one another. Again, ordnungs do the exact opposite of what Paul taught. They cause everyone to judge anyone who doesn’t conform to one standard.

A second example of differing convictions in the early church revolved around the Sabbath. Obviously, Jewish believers would have strictly kept the Sabbath every week—from Friday at sundown to Saturday at sundown (as Jews have always done). Gentiles, however, would not have been accustomed to that Jewish practice and may have questioned its relative importance.

Paul continued:

One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats [meat], does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not [does not eat any meat], for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living (Rom. 14:5–9).

Paul’s point is that all true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are striving to obey Him. And that is what matters. Contrary to the “vegetarians for Jesus” who judged the meat-eaters to be idolaters, those meat-eaters were giving thanks to the Lord prior to every meal. They were not idolaters! They were servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. For that reason, both groups should stop judging each other and looking at each other with contempt, as they apparently were:

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But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God (Rom. 14:10–12).

Ordnungs set up church members to constantly judge each other and consequently to treat some members with contempt, to the point of excommunicating and shunning them. Ordnungs do not promote tolerance but intolerance.

### **Causing a Brother to Stumble**

Paul continued:

Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. For he who in this way serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or to do anything by which your brother stumbles. The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin (Rom. 14:13–23).

Here Paul mentions one other point of difference among Christians in his day—the drinking of wine. From an historical perspective, it would seem doubtful that the issue was over the propriety of alcohol (as it is in some Christian circles today), but rather that some wine was perhaps dedicated to idols. Regardless, just as was the case regarding eating meat and keeping the Sabbath, Paul did not lay down an ordnung rule regarding wine. In *every* case, the only rule was to love one another, which requires tolerating those whose convictions differ regarding matters in which Scripture is not definitive.

In this final paragraph of Romans 14, Paul makes an additional point. He first addresses the meat-eaters, in whose camp Paul admitted he belonged because he knew that no meat is "unclean" even if it has been sacrificed to an idol. He would never want, however, to cause one of the vegetarians to

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“stumble.” That is, he didn’t want to do anything that might contribute to influencing a “weaker brother” to violate his conscience.

For example, imagine a group of meat-eating Christians sharing a meal when a vegetarian joins them. Wanting to fit in, he might, against his conscience, eat meat. Although his eating meat was actually not a sin, because he *thinks* eating meat is a sin, to him it is an act of disobedience. As Paul wrote, “To him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean” (v. 14b).

Therefore, walking in love requires those who are “stronger” to always consider their “weaker” brothers and sisters when they are together. That, in fact, was Paul’s summarizing point at the beginning of Romans 15:

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification (Rom. 15:1–2).

And as Paul concludes the entire section, it becomes even more clear that the dividing issues in Rome were between Jewish and Gentile believers:

Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. For I say that Christ has become a servant to *the circumcision* [Jews] on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, and for *the Gentiles* to glorify God for His mercy (Rom. 15:7–9, emphasis added).

This exposition should make it clear that Romans 14–15 cannot be used to compel people to keep every rule of the *ordnung* so as not to offend others. All of Paul’s instructions were directed towards churches full of members who held differing convictions. In Plain churches, everyone is required to publicly declare, at their baptism and twice annually thereafter, their agreement with the hundreds of rules of the *ordnung*. The Plain people do not exhibit toleration of differing convictions on these extra-biblical matters, because differing convictions are not permitted! *Ordnungs are thus antithetical to everything Paul taught in Romans 14 and 15.*

### **1 Corinthians 8–10**

Paul covers this same issue in his first letter to the Corinthians, and he makes the same points, so I will not repeat them. But here is his summary statement:

All things [like eating meat sacrificed to idols] are lawful, but not all things [like eating meat sacrificed to idols in the presence of vegetarian believers] are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things [like eating meat sacrificed to idols in the presence of vegetarian believers] edify. Let no one seek his own good, but that of his neighbor. Eat anything that is sold in the meat market without asking questions for conscience’ sake;

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“for the earth is the Lord’s, and all it contains.” If one of the unbelievers invites you [to eat with him] and you want to go, eat anything that is set before you without asking questions for conscience’ sake. But if anyone says to you [that is, if any Christian vegetarian warns you], “This is meat sacrificed to idols,” do not eat it, for the sake of the one who informed you, and for conscience’ sake; I mean not your own conscience, but the other man’s (1 Cor. 10:23–29a).

Those are wise words aimed at meat eaters. But next, Paul addresses the “weaker brethren” who were passing judgment upon him because he ate meat without any scruples:

For why is my freedom judged by another’s conscience? If I partake with thankfulness, why am I slandered concerning that for which I give thanks? (1 Cor. 10:29b–30).

So Paul addressed *both* groups, calling each side to love one another and be tolerant of their differences. Ordnungs, however, eliminate any need for toleration between sides by legitimizing one view that is intolerant of anything else.

If, as Weaver and Zimmerman claim, these passages in Romans and 1 Corinthians have application to Plain ordnungs, who then are the “weak brothers” in Plain churches who believe that something is wrong when it is not actually wrong according to the standard of God’s Word? And who are the “strong brothers” who, like the apostle Paul, don’t share the convictions of the “weak brothers” because they simply follow the revelation of God’s Word?

If any analogy can be drawn, the weak brothers would have to be most Plain leaders and all who join them in slavishly following hundreds of man-made rules. The strong brothers would be those who realize that God’s commandments are sufficient for those who love God and that no ordnung is necessary to motivate church members to live holy lives. However, Plain churches do not follow Paul’s call for toleration, because they show no toleration for “strong brothers.” The strong brothers are always excommunicated in Plain churches. How does that practice harmonize with Romans 14–15 and 1 Corinthians 8–10? It does not, nor does it harmonize with Paul’s concluding statement in 1 Corinthians 10:31–33:

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved (1 Cor. 10:31–33).

Ordnung keepers are consumed with pleasing, and not offending, others who keep the group’s ordnung. They have no concern for pleasing or not offending others.

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So is my goal to persuade all Plain people to abandon their ordnungs? No, my goal is to persuade all Plain people to *truly* believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. When they do, pleasing Him will become the most important thing in their lives, and they will focus on obeying His commandments. They may end up holding different convictions regarding issues on which the Bible is silent, but they will tolerate those of different convictions. Some Plain folks, for example, will have no scruples about owning and driving cars. Others might still choose to avoid owning a car. But they will all love each other, and the Plain folks who own cars will be happy to provide taxi rides to those who don't! That is just one example of how Christians of different cultures and convictions can demonstrate to the world that they are all one in Christ!

# Chapter 13

## The Plain Dress Regress, Part 1

WBP? Chapter 5, pages 95-99

In chapter 5 of *Why Be Plain?*, “The Plain Dress Regress,” the authors lament that Plain standards of dress are being compromised in some Plain circles.

Obviously, outward attire is an important issue to Weaver and Zimmerman, not only because they devote an entire chapter to it, but because of all the other times they mention it in other chapters. Thankfully, they usually stress, as they do in chapter 5, that what is on the inside is equally or more important as what is on the outside. They even acknowledge that one can look good on the outside (by Plain dress standards) but be rotten on the inside. I only wish they understood that once the inside is clean, that *guarantees* that the outside will automatically be cleaned up as well. That is what a genuine new birth does. As Jesus said:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, *first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also* (Matt. 23:35-26, emphasis added).<sup>13</sup>

Jesus wasn't talking about clothing, however, when He spoke of the cleaning up of outsides. He was talking about living a life of holiness, which has very little to do with outward attire. Holy people are those who display the fruit of

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<sup>13</sup> Weaver and Zimmerman quote this very passage in chapter 5, but they seem to assume that if the inside of a person is clean, they will then dress Plain on the outside.

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the *Holy Spirit*, which Paul lists as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (see Gal. 5:22–23). To manifest all of that wonderful fruit, you must be born again, because only then does the Holy Spirit indwell you.

Ordnungs can't regulate inner holiness, and neither can they regulate true outward holiness. I've never seen a rule in any ordnung that requires—under the threat of excommunication and shunning—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Ordnung rules only regulate behaviors that ordnung creators think are desirable. The result is an outward skin that may well mask a rotten core.

That is the inherent weakness and danger of ordnungs. They motivate people to focus on the outside at the neglect of the inside. As a result, they deceive themselves and others regarding their true inward state.

All Plain churches put an emphasis on dress standards that is completely foreign to the Bible. Plain ordnungs regulate the smallest details of dress, down to the width of women's cap strings and men's hat brims, plus scores of other minutiae that Weaver and Zimmerman never mention. They know there is no biblical justification for such detailed dress codes, so they ignore this issue, which demonstrates the progression that seems to be inherent in every ordnung to become increasingly more specific, demanding, and unreasonable.

### **Peter on Women's Dress**

I've addressed Weaver and Zimmerman's doctrines on dress earlier, so I will not repeat what we've covered previously. There are only two passages in the New Testament letters that specifically address the subject of dress, and in both cases they address women's clothing only. Yet Weaver and Zimmerman extract unwarranted application to men's dress from both passages without offering any biblical or logical justification:

Although the next Scripture refers to the dress of women, the principles given surely apply to men as well:

1 Peter 3:3. *"Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing gold, or of putting on of apparel; 4. But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. 5. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection to their own husbands"* (p. 97).

Interestingly, the authors failed to quote the first two verses of 1 Peter 3, which say, *"In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior"* (1 Pet. 3:1–2, emphasis added).

## *The Plain Dress Regress, Part 1*

Clearly, Peter was writing exclusively to wives, as is further proved by the fact that in verse 5 (which the authors did quote), he admonishes wives to be “in subjection to their own husbands.”

Obviously, the general message for wives is that they should not be overly focused on their outward self, especially at the expense of neglecting the more important inward self. Peter was not telling wives to completely neglect their outer appearance. That would likely not make their husbands—to whom Peter admonished them to submit in this passage—very happy. Peter was only trying to balance an existing imbalance.

Based on what we know about how some ancient Greek women focused on their outward appearance, Peter’s words make even more sense. Greek women sometimes wore elaborate, intricate, braided hairstyles, woven with gold strings and pearls, that would have required hours of their time to fix. Peter didn’t address men on this issue because men were not spending hours on their hairstyle or adornments. Nevertheless, Weaver and Zimmerman find support for Plain dress doctrine for *both* women and men where there is none:

Verse 3: Peter says Christians should not adorn themselves outwardly, then goes on to give a few examples—apparently making guidelines on things that were a problem at that time (p. 98).

That sentence contains at least three misleading assumptions.

First, Peter did not say that *Christians* should avoid anything. He was writing only to *wives*.

Second, Peter did not say that wives should not adorn themselves outwardly. If we consider the meaning of the entire passage rather than isolating a few words, it becomes clear that Peter was admonishing wives to prioritize their inward character over their outward appearance, and specifically an inward character that reflects submission to their husbands. This is why the NASB renders 1 Peter 3:3, “Your adornment must not be *merely* external.”

Third, Peter was not making “guidelines,” which is a deceptive Plain code word for “ordnung rules that will be enforced at the threat of excommunication, shunning and hellfire.” Peter was simply applying *biblical* principles illustrated by *biblical women*, one of whom he mentions by name in the final verse in the passage (namely Sarah, who happened to be renowned for her beauty; see Gen. 12:14). All husbands desire a wife who is easy to get along with (the essence of marital “submission”), and they generally appreciate having a wife who values her God-given beauty and attractiveness.

Weaver and Zimmerman continue:

*Plaiting the hair.* Braiding the hair to show off its beauty is here forbidden.

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As Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 11, a woman's hair should be covered with a head covering. The principle forbids anything that draws attention to the hair. That would include today's elaborate and puffed-up hairdos, as well as fancy clasps or ribbons. For men, that principle forbids styling the hair or wearing something on the head to draw attention to one's looks (p. 98).

This explanation illustrates that Plain doctrine, once again, is often nothing more than a tradition searching for a scripture. If Peter was prohibiting any and all hair braiding, then he was also forbidding any and all "putting on of apparel." No hair braiding and no clothing. Somehow I doubt that is what Peter meant.

As for the authors' claim that Paul taught in 1 Corinthians 11 that "a woman's hair should be covered with a head covering," Paul actually taught that wives should have their heads covered when they, in the context of a Christian gathering, prayed or prophesied (see 1 Cor. 11:5). Nowhere does the Bible tell women that they should always wear a head covering (more on that in two chapters). When Mary used her hair to wipe her tears from Jesus' feet, she obviously did not have her hair covered, and Jesus did not correct or rebuke her (see John 12:3).

But Weaver and Zimmerman extract, from their false assumption, a prohibition against *any* hair styling for both women *and men*, as well as any "fancy clasps or ribbons"—yet another illustration of how every ordnung evolves to become increasingly more specific, demanding, and unreasonable. Devoted followers of Christ all over the world have no objection to a woman who spends a few minutes braiding her hair or using a ribbon to fasten it, much less thinking she should be excommunicated from her church for doing so.

Weaver and Zimmerman next claim:

*Wearing of gold.* This forbids all jewelry (p. 98).

Again, if Peter was forbidding all jewelry, he was also forbidding all "putting on of apparel." As we can see, Peter's concern was that wives should not be overly invested in their outward appearance at the expense of their inward character.

As I noted earlier, when Abraham's servant realized that Rebekah was God's choice as a wife for Abraham's son, Isaac, he immediately "took a gold ring weighing a half-shekel and two bracelets for her wrists weighing ten shekels in gold" (Gen. 24:22). He put the ring on Rebekah's finger and the bracelets on her wrists (see Gen. 24:30). If Abraham's servant had this jewelry ready for Rebekah, how likely is it that Abraham's wife, Sarah, whom Peter cites as a holy woman worthy of imitation, owned no gold jewelry?

Moreover, Jesus didn't seem to think wearing jewelry was sinful when He

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told the story of the prodigal son whose father, at his return, “put a ring on his hand” (Luke 15:22).

*Putting on of apparel.* While likely referring to fancy and costly clothes, this refers to something more as well—a preoccupation with clothes and with adorning the body. The principle suggests that any apparel that is for adornment rather than concealment is wrong for a Christian. That would include fancy, immodest, and form-fitting apparel. God meant clothing to conceal. Form-fitting clothing is meant to reveal (p. 98).

Finally, a single sentence I can agree with! “Putting on of apparel” clearly refers to a “preoccupation with clothes and with adorning the body.” But where is the line drawn as to what constitutes “adornment”? What is fancy or not fancy, modest or immodest, form-fitting or not form-fitting? Not everyone agrees on those issues. Just to make sure, why don’t Plain ordnungs require all Plain women to wear full-body, head-to-toe, loose-fitting, black burkas, like some Muslim women?

The Bible describes both Rachel and Esther as being “beautiful of form and face” (Gen. 29:17; Esth. 2:7). These two aspects of their beauty were observable. Were they sinning? The Bible also declares that Rebecca was “very beautiful” (Gen. 24:6). It mentions the physical beauty of Abigail, Bathsheba, Tamar, Abishag, Queen Vashti and Job’s daughters (1 Sam. 25:3; 2 Sam. 11:2; 13:1; 1 Kin. 1:3; Esth. 1:11; Job 42:15). Did all those women dress like modern Plain women? Did they do nothing to maintain or enhance their beauty?

Weaver and Zimmerman claim that there is a fundamental, moral biblical principle underlying their convictions, as they declare that “Proud clothing indicates a proud heart beneath” (p. 98). Does that mean that anyone who does not follow a Plain dress code is prideful? What about Jesus, His apostles, and all the early Christians, none of whom dressed like modern Plain people or had ordnungs? What about the millions of Christians over the past 2,000 years who didn’t dress like Plain people? Were they prideful?

Could the potential for pride regarding dress be even higher for people who think that they are the only people who dress in a way that pleases God?

### **The Abomination of Women Wearing Men’s Clothing**

Weaver and Zimmerman next mention the Old Testament’s prohibition of dressing like the opposite gender:

God said in Deuteronomy 22:5 that it is an abomination to Him when men and women wear the same type of clothing. God assigned different roles to man and woman, and also a different pattern of dress. It is surely not meant to be any different in NT times. Nonetheless, it is completely accepted by liberal churches when women wear the same style of clothing as men. The Plain People believe that is an abomination to God (pp. 98–99).

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Deuteronomy 22:5 is not a prohibition against women wearing trousers, as trousers were not worn by men in Moses' day. Rather, both men and women wore what we would refer to as robes or tunics, and the differences between men's and women's clothing were slight. So by modern standards, ancient Israelite men wore women's clothing. Here is a description of ancient biblical dress from the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archeology:

The Bible is quite detailed about the Israelites' clothing. Typical garb for men included a long shirt-like undergarment, a long outer tunic, and an outer coat. Special long fringes were added to the bottom of the outfit as a reminder to keep God's commandments (Numbers 15:38–39). A cloth wrapped around the head was another common item. Women wore similarly long clothing in the form of dresses and robes. A veil was also often worn.

There is archaeological evidence for these outfits. The most helpful is in the form of ancient Assyrian art, depicting subjugated Israelites. The Lachish Reliefs depict the massive Assyrian campaign against Lachish by Sennacherib (as described in 2 Kings 18, 2 Chronicles 32, Isaiah 37 and Sennacherib's annals). Conquered Israelites are shown being paraded, with men in either long tunics or with their garments "girded up" to a kilt length, with beards and short-cropped hair (as opposed to the long hair of the Assyrian men) or wearing a head-wrap. Women are shown in longer, loose, ankle-length dresses or tunics, wearing veils that reach from the head to the ankle. Children wore smaller versions of the outfits corresponding to their respective gender.<sup>14</sup>

It seems quite safe to conclude that in Deuteronomy 22:5, God was condemning cross-dressing, when one dresses like the opposite gender for perverse sexual reasons. We will further explore the subject of women's attire in the next chapter.

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<sup>14</sup> Eames, Christopher: Clothing: A 'Cultural Universal' in Archaeology and the Bible: <https://armstronginstitute.org/121-clothing-a-cultural-universal-in-archaeology-and-the-bible#>

# Chapter 14

## The Plain Dress Regress, Part 2

WBP? Chapter 5, pages 99-109

Weaver and Zimmerman next appeal to Paul's instructions about women's attire in 1 Timothy:

Therefore I want the *men* in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands,<sup>15</sup> without wrath and dissension. Likewise, I want *women* to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for *women* making a claim to godliness (1 Tim. 2:8–10).

Here is their commentary:

So Paul also gave guidelines to the church, forbidding the same things Peter did. Since their rules come over [sic] much of the same dress, it seems likely that the apostles had met to make dress guidelines (p. 99).

First, contrary to Weaver and Zimmerman's claim that Paul was addressing "the church" in this passage, he first addressed *men* regarding prayer and then *women* regarding their adornment.

Second, twice in two sentences, the authors again use their misleading word

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<sup>15</sup> I wonder, since Weaver and Zimmerman so stringently recommend (and apply to both men and women) Paul's instructions to women about their dress, whether they also follow Paul's instructions that men should pray with uplifted hands. Is that an observable feature at Plain church gatherings?

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“guidelines”—their euphemism for “rules that are enforced under the threat of excommunication, shunning and hellfire.” Paul, however, had nothing of the sort in mind. His words, “I want women to ...” are simply an admonition, with no implied underlying threat of punishment for those who don’t heed it.

Third, the authors’ assumption that “the apostles had met to make dress guidelines” is supported by neither logic, common sense, or the historical biblical record. There is no reason to propose that the apostles would have wasted any of their valuable time meeting to discuss this trivial matter.

Peter and Paul addressed many similar topics and issues in their letters. Their similar admonitions regarding women’s adornment bear no resemblance to Plain ordnungs that stipulate precise details for women’s uniforms, details that are constantly monitored by church leaders who are ready to punish those who deviate from the approved styles, colors, and fasteners. Weaver and Zimmerman’s argument that these Scripture passages support Plain ordnung dress codes is a twisting of God’s Word.

### **More Claims**

Weaver and Zimmerman go on to make additional absurd claims regarding Paul’s words about women’s adornment:

This Scripture clearly states that what Christians put on must be different from the apparel of those who do not profess godliness! It teaches that it is not right for anyone who follows Christ to wear the world’s apparel (p. 99).

No, this passage, addressed only to women, states that Christian women’s outward adornment should reflect their claim to godliness. That means avoiding immodest and expensive clothing and accessories, as well as not expending undue time and effort on their outward appearance. They should focus on adorning themselves with good works.

All these practices are based on *moral* principles. Christians should be careful that they don’t cause others to stumble; thus Christian women should dress modestly. Christians should care for the poor; thus they should not waste money purchasing gold and pearls to weave with one’s elaborate hair braids, or expensive clothes. Christians should focus not on themselves but on loving their neighbors, so they should not expend undue time on their outward appearance. But not spending *any* time on one’s outward appearance is *not* an act of loving one’s neighbor! I’m glad my wife has a reasonable concern for her outward appearance, as that is a reflection of her love for me and for everyone she encounters throughout her day. How one dresses reflects one’s respect for others.

If Christian women follow Paul’s admonition, their outward appearance will certainly be different from that of self-centered, unregener-

## *The Plain Dress Regress, Part 2*

ate women. But Paul never asked Christian women to wear Plain uniforms so that they would stand out from all non-Plain people—whom they judge as “worldly” because they don’t wear Plain uniforms!

The authors continue:

Both Peter and Paul laid down guidelines for Christian dress. Yet, when the Plain People make these very same rules part of their church standards, modern Christianity cries “legalism!” or “commandments of men!” The Plain People call it obeying the Bible (p. 99).

Again, Peter and Paul did not lay down or enforce any rules (or what Weaver and Zimmerman call “guidelines”) for Christian dress. They simply admonished Christian women to adorn themselves in a godly manner. Moreover, Plain people do not “make *these very same rules* [which were described as ‘guidelines’ in the previous sentence] part of their church standards” (emphasis added). Rather, they devise scores of rules that Peter and Paul never mentioned and then coerce all women to obey those rules through social and religious pressure.

Although Plain People may call their dress codes “obeying the Bible,” their dress codes cannot be found anywhere in the Bible. They are following their traditions and claiming those traditions are based on the Bible when they aren’t. Neither Jesus, His apostles, the first Christians, nor the early Anabaptists dressed to purposely make themselves stand out from everyone who was not part of their group. Yet Weaver and Zimmerman tell their readers:

The world should be able to simply observe a Christian and know by his dress that he isn’t one of them. We are to keep a simple, different, and unchanging pattern of dress.

Some say it is enough to merely wear modest attire without being distinctly different from the world. But if we’re not separated then we are still conformed (p. 100).

Not only is that idea that Christians should be immediately recognizable by their distinctive dress absent from the New Testament, but it is also absent from the 1632 Dordrecht Confession. And if wearing the same modest attire as the world indicates that we are still “conformed to the world,” then does eating the same food as the world also prove our conformity? If people in the world go fishing and hunting, and if I also fish and hunt, does that make me “conformed to the world”?

### **Twisting the Sermon on the Mount**

Weaver and Zimmerman treat the Sermon on the Mount in similarly creative fashion:

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As Jesus taught, people ought to stop and take a second look at a Christian's ways. They ought to be able to see that we have something different. We must let our lights shine so that others see and glorify God (Matt 5:16). To dress like the world [that is, not wear Plain uniforms] so that our lights don't shine is hiding our candle under a bushel. A person who blends in with the world gives the world no reason to notice Christ in His [sic] life and glorify God (pp. 100-101).

Jesus told His followers in His Sermon on the Mount to let their light shine before others and glorify God. Jesus illustrated his message with many specific examples related to personal holiness in that famous sermon, but not once did He mention anything about proper or improper dress. Therefore, it must be possible for Christians to let their light shine without wearing distinctive attire. Instead, Jesus instructed believers, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may *see your good works*, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14). Christians let their light shine by doing good works, not by wearing distinctive uniforms that sends the world a message that "We are the superior, holy people."

### **Twisting Even the Old Testament**

Weaver and Zimmerman then turn to an Old Testament passage that doesn't support Plain dress traditions either. In the Mosaic Law, God instructed the Israelites to add "tassels on the corners of their garments ... and ... on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue" (Num. 15:38). Those corner tassels and cords were to remind them to obey God's commandments.

Weaver and Zimmerman claim that this passage in Numbers shows that "God wanted His people to wear distinctive garb" (p. 101). Somehow, small corner tassels on ancient Israelite clothing support the Plain concept of wearing an entire wardrobe that identifies one as a Christian and makes one stand out from everyone else!

Weaver and Zimmerman elaborate on their theory with three points, the first of which is that Plain clothing reminds Plain people "of who they are suppose [sic] to be serving." They say, "It is impossible to go to a carnal event and blend in with the world when wearing the garb of Plain people. We don't fit in and our clothing makes it clear that we shouldn't be there" (p. 101).

So when Plain people wear Plain garb, it helps motivate them to stay away from places they might otherwise go. But aren't they born again? Don't they have the Holy Spirit in them? Don't they love Jesus and thus desire to keep His commandments? Why would they have any desire to go to a sinful place?

We can see once again that ordnung rules are a cheap substitute for the new birth, the indwelling Spirit, and a heart of love for God. Wearing Plain uniforms serves the same purpose as prison uniforms—to discourage prisoners

## *The Plain Dress Regress, Part 2*

from trying to escape. Prison inmates usually aren't motivated to behave by inward moral convictions. They need deterrents, like walls and bright orange prison uniforms. That is what ordnungs are all about as well.

Weaver and Zimmerman double down on their point:

It could be mentioned that if a woman appears in public without a bonnet, there is very little that proclaims her faith and nonconformity. A dress alone is not enough. The same can be said about men appearing in public without [Plain] hats—which is usually an attempt to blend in with the world (pp. 101-102).

A woman without a bonnet and a man without a hat have “very little that proclaims their faith and nonconformity”? What about their obedience to Jesus' commandments? What about the fruit of the Spirit? What about if they share the gospel?

And did the early Christian women all wear bonnets in public? Did the early Christian men all wear Plain hats in public? Is there any evidence that the early Christians wore any distinctive attire to make themselves stand out from unbelievers? The answer to all three questions is no.

Weaver and Zimmerman's second supporting point is that distinctive Plain-attire helps prevent pride and lust.

As for preventing pride, I have already questioned whether Plain dress does this. I don't believe that the large majority of people who wear non-Plain clothing have any issue with pride regarding what they wear. To most of us, clothes are just clothes.

As for lust, perhaps Plain dress might help prevent it. But I am doubtful, in view of the amount of sexual sin in Plain communities (see chapter 22). And I do not agree that preventing lust is a legitimate reason to devise an enforced dress code. Rather, we should preach the gospel and teach believers to obey the New Testament's commandments and admonitions, including Peter and Paul's words about women's attire. Born-again women have the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and hearts that love Jesus, so they will dress modestly in public.

The authors' third supporting point is that Plain clothing helps Plain people to “be a separate and holy people” (p. 102). I've watched many of those “holy Plain people” who wear distinct attire excommunicate and shun their own relatives when those relatives become born again and start loving God and obeying His commandments instead of pleasing people and their sacred traditions. I've received plenty of nasty letters from Plain people who clearly hate me because I love and obey Jesus. If the excommunication of Jesus-following family members and the writing of nasty letters to other Jesus-following people reflect the hearts of Plain people, it is obvious that

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their distinctive clothing is not helping *them* be “holy people.”

### **Threatening Hell for Non-Plain Dressing**

Weaver and Zimmerman, however, don't seem concerned about the many ordnung-keeping, Plain-dressing communities that expel anyone who is truly born again—an action that vividly testifies to the communities' true spiritual state. Rather, they resort to threatening people who don't embrace Plain uniforms that they may be cast into hell:

Those who are ashamed to be identified with God and His children now, may someday find that God is ashamed of them. Jesus made this statement [in Matthew 10:32–33]: *“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.”* The best way to acknowledge and confess Christ to everyone who sees us is by our dress and lifestyle.

The one who dresses like the world [non-Plain] is, in a sense, denying Christ before men, and so is a church member who rejects the church dress standards (pp. 103-104).

It is heartbreaking that anyone could be so deceived as to think that the best way to publicly confess Christ is by wearing a clothing style from 100 years ago and by shunning some modern technology. The word “confess” refers to something one does with one's mouth. It is a verbal declaration. One does not “confess Christ before men” by wearing certain clothing any more than Jesus confesses believers before His Father by wearing certain clothing. Christians confess Jesus before men by verbally declaring their belief in Him and their love for Him, something few Plain people ever do. In fact, in many Plain circles, sharing the gospel with unbelievers is considered a prideful act punishable under the ordnung. Those Plain circles are living in complete spiritual and biblical darkness.

### **The Attire of the Pharisees and the Rich Man**

Weaver and Zimmerman next point out that Jesus criticized the Pharisees for “dressing to be admired by men” (p. 104). So, does dressing according to a Plain dress code eliminate any possibility of being prideful regarding one's attire? (“God, I thank You that I am not like other men ... I fast twice a week ... I tithe all that I get ... I wear ordnung-approved clothing.”)

And isn't conforming to ordnung dress codes all about dressing for the approval of other Plain people and Plain leaders? Is it actually about pleasing God when, in fact, no such dress code can be found anywhere among His commandments?

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The authors also point out that Jesus mentioned the costly apparel of the rich man who ignored Lazarus' plight. But that is not a call for following a Plain dress code. It is a lesson in spending money unnecessarily on yourself rather than sharing it with the poor. You can follow Plain dress codes stringently and never give a dime to help the poor.

### **Learning from the Creator**

Jesus told His followers that they could learn something about their heavenly Father by observing two of His creations: birds of the air and lilies of the field (see Matt. 6:25–33). From both, we not only learn that God can be trusted to provide food and clothing. We also learn something from the endless variety of beauty revealed in His handiwork. In millions of other plants, animals, fish, mountains, lakes, moon and stars, His infinite creativity is unveiled. No one who has ever observed any part of His magnificent creation called it "plain."

We can also see His beauty in the crown of His creation—human beings created in His own image. Amazingly, no two people in the world are identical. Every person has a unique face, personality, gifts and talents. Even identical twins have different personalities!

How tragic it is to crush people's uniqueness and attempt to squeeze them all into one mold by making them all wear the same clothing—and even worse, requiring them to wear black, the color symbolic of ignorance and death. Plain requirements leave no room for self-expression and personal taste. They require servants to bury their unique talents in the ground lest a few self-focused souls become jealous. All this is under the guise of "pleasing God" whose entire creation continually testifies of His love of multi-faceted beauty and variety, and who once said of field lilies, "Not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these" (Matt. 6:29).

That is why there is nothing that resembles a Plain dress code in the Bible.



## Chapter 15

# The Rejected Head Covering

WBP? Chapter 6, 111-129

Weaver and Zimmerman devote Chapter 6 of *Why Be Plain?* to the issue of women's head coverings, a defining characteristic of Plain women's attire, which Paul addressed in 1 Corinthians 11:1–17. Although much of what Paul wrote in that passage is clear, honest readers will admit that it raises some questions.

For example, why is Christ dishonored if a man (actually, a married man) prays or prophesies with a covered head? Nothing in the Old Testament supports such a concept. On the contrary, Jewish men have been wearing skull caps since the second century as a sign of reverence towards God. Moreover, as a Jew, Paul certainly knew that the priests under the Old Covenant (who were all males) were *required* to wear head-covering turbans (and very fancy ones) when they ministered in the tabernacle or temple (see Ex. 28:4, 37–39; 29:6; 39:28–31; Lev. 8:9).

And why are men (actually, married men) dishonored by women (actually, their wives) who do what men should do to honor Christ—that is, not covering their heads when they pray or prophesy?

What is the significance of a woman whose head has been shaved? There is nothing else in the Bible about that. And how is a woman who prays or prophesies with an uncovered head the same as a woman whose head is shaved? And why does Paul mention angels in this passage?

## *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*

These and other questions challenge modern interpreters. Many offer explanations that are not biblically based, logical, or persuasive. Weaver and Zimmerman's explanation of Paul's words, "For her hair is given to her for a covering," certainly falls into that category:

What Paul is saying is that her hair is a natural covering indicating that she should be veiled with an artificial one. He is using her long hair as an illustration that another covering is needed (pp. 120-121).

That isn't very persuasive. It isn't logical.

Weaver and Zimmerman also apparently believe that angels answer prayers and decide whom to protect, as they suggest that "angels might not heed prayers or give protection" to uncovered women (p. 118). Moreover, they suggest that smaller head coverings might result in less protection (p. 125). They even resort to anecdotal superstitions: "Many women have personal testimonies of how their head covering seemed to hinder those who sought to do evil to them" (p. 119).

### **What Is Clear**

It should be clear that Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11 had nothing to do with *all-day* head coverings for females. His instructions only addressed women (and men) being covered or uncovered when praying or prophesying—that is, when speaking to or on behalf of God. Here's the proof:

Every man who has *something on his head while praying or prophesying* disgraces his head. But every woman who has *her head uncovered while praying or prophesying* disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved (1 Cor. 11:4–5, emphasis added).

We can add more proof from another sentence near the end of the same passage: "Judge for yourselves: is it proper for *a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?*" (1 Cor. 11:13, emphasis added). Paul did not ask, "Is it proper for a woman to ever have her head uncovered?" but "Is it proper for a woman *to pray to God with her head uncovered?*"

Because Paul specifically mentioned women *prophesying* in 11:5—something done to edify others (see 1 Cor. 14:4)—it is clear that what he wrote about head coverings applied to women *during Christian gatherings*. That is, he was not instructing Christian women to cover their heads when praying alone at home, or to cover their heads at any other place or time for that matter.

Weaver and Zimmerman, however, disagree with that point:

Paul wrote that she should have her hair covered when prophesying. If he was only talking about church services he was contradicting himself,

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since he forbade women to speak or preach in church (1 Cor. 14:34 and 1 Tim. 1:11–12) (p. 126).

So the authors reason that Paul's instruction to women about keeping their heads covered when praying or prophesying could *only* have had application to when they were somewhere other than a church gathering—when it was acceptable for them to speak. Therefore, apparently, women's Spirit-inspired prophecies would not have been permitted at any time when "two or three were gathered together in Jesus' name"—when He said He would be "in their midst" (Matt. 18:20)—because that would have constituted a genuine church gathering at which women were not permitted to speak! All of that begs the question: When exactly was it okay for a woman who received a prophecy from the Holy Spirit to speak what the Spirit gave her? Only when she was alone? Hmmm.

Weaver and Zimmerman fail to mention that Paul not only told *women* to "keep silent" (1 Cor. 14:34) during church gatherings but also told *those who were speaking in tongues without interpretation* to "keep silent" (1 Cor. 14:28) during church gatherings. And he also told *certain prophets* to "keep silent" (1 Cor. 14:30)<sup>16</sup> during church gatherings—all within the space of eight verses. In no case was Paul telling *any* of those groups to be *totally* silent during the *entirety* of a church gathering. Rather, there were specific times when each group should "keep silent."

Certain people who were speaking in tongues with no interpreter were out of order. They should stop their practice and "keep silent" in that situation. Similarly, some prophets were not showing consideration to other prophets by giving them an opportunity to speak, which was out of order. They should "keep silent" and let other prophets share what God revealed to them. And some women were asking their husbands questions and disturbing the meeting, which was also out of order. So they should "keep silent." Paul goes on to say, "If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home" (1 Cor. 14:35).

Obviously, women were praying and prophesying during church gatherings, and the only women whom Paul was hoping to silence were those who were causing disturbances by asking their husbands questions. If the men and women were sitting separately during the Corinthians' church gatherings, it becomes even clearer why wives asking questions of their husbands would disturb the meetings.

All this is to say that, if we claim that 1 Corinthians 11:1–17 is about women's *daily* head coverings, we are reading something that is not there. And if we claim that the passage says women should *always* wear head coverings, then we must also say that men must *never* wear hats, or any head covering.

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16 In all three cases, the Greek verb translated as "keep silent" is identical: *sigāō*.

### **Pray Without Ceasing, So Always Keep Your Head Covered**

Those who defend Plain traditions often claim that because the New Testament teaches all Christians to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17), Paul’s instructions to women in 1 Corinthians 11 about keeping their heads covered when praying apply to their every waking hour. Women, they say, should wear head coverings all the time as they “pray without ceasing.” If we apply that same logic to men, however, then men should not wear hats at any time, since they too should “pray without ceasing.”

Without offering any evidence or proof, Weaver and Zimmerman make this astonishing claim:

When Paul said men shouldn’t pray or prophesy with their heads covered, he wasn’t talking about a weather protective covering. He was talking about a prayer cap with a spiritual symbol like the one that conservative [Plain] women wear. We have no reason to think that it is wrong to talk to God while wearing a weather protection hat. We simply ought not put on a prayer cap to pray as do men of other religions (p. 114).

There is not a shred of biblical or historical evidence for Weaver and Zimmerman’s claim. And Paul made no such distinction regarding men’s hat styles. He said nothing about “prayer caps worn by men of other religions.” Rather, he wrote, “Every man who has *something* on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head” (1 Cor. 11:4).

So we have the choice of believing the apostle Paul or Weaver and Zimmerman. I’m going to stick with Paul. If women dishonor their heads (their husbands) *any time* they don’t wear a head covering, then men dishonor their head (Christ) *any time* they do wear a head covering.

There are no requirements anywhere in the Bible regarding women wearing head coverings as part of their daily attire. You won’t find daily female head coverings mandated in the Law of Moses or the Law of Christ. The instructions regarding female head coverings that Paul explained in 1 Corinthians 11 are their first mention in the Bible.

Granted, cultural norms have dictated women’s head coverings around the world in both ancient and modern times, including in ancient Corinth (which we will soon consider), but nothing codified it in any scriptural law from God for His people.

### **Some Historical Context Regarding Corinth**

To attempt to interpret Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 11, we should note that in ancient Greece, women were generally kept sequestered in homes, either the home of their parents before marriage, or of their husbands after marriage. When they ventured out into the public, married women in par-

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ticular not only covered their heads but also fully veiled their faces, with the exception of their eyes.<sup>17</sup>

Those coverings conveyed that a woman was “off limits,” which served a valuable purpose in a society in which sex with prostitutes and female slaves was considered normal and acceptable. For a married woman to go out into public uncovered or unveiled would have been scandalous, something done only by a prostitute or bold adulteress.

So as you imagine Corinthian women at Christian gatherings, that is how you should imagine them. Their head coverings *fully* covered their heads, including their faces. The part of the head-covering cloth that covered their faces could be easily pulled back so that, for instance, women could expose their faces for conversations with their husbands, children, or other women, or to eat something.

But Corinthian women looked nothing like modern Plain women, who fasten their long hair under a thin, form-fitting white cap tied on with strings. If ancient Greek women saw modern Plain women, they might gasp at their immodesty. “Are all Plain women prostitutes?” they might ask. (Of course, they would be even more shocked by non-Plain women.)

Any group appealing to 1 Corinthians 11 in defense of small white head caps, black bonnets, head scarves, or other modern “head coverings” should do some additional historical homework. If any modern Christian group wants to copy the culture reflected in 1 Corinthians 11, their women should start completely covering their heads and veiling their faces. When Weaver and Zimmerman write, “The rejection of the head covering is just another part of the great falling away that is occurring at the end of time draws near” (p.

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17 An excellent historical resource regarding these facts is the book *Aphrodite's Tortoise: The Veiled Woman of Ancient Greece*, by Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones. Here is the publisher's description: “Greek women routinely wore the veil. That is the unexpected finding of this meticulous study, one with interesting implications for the origins of Western civilisation. The Greeks, popularly (and rightly) credited with the invention of civic openness, are revealed as also part of a more Eastern tradition of seclusion. Llewellyn-Jones' work proceeds from literary and, notably, from iconographic evidence. In sculpture and vase painting it demonstrates the presence of the veil, often covering the head, but also more unobtrusively folded back onto the shoulders. This discreet fashion not only gave a privileged view of the face to the ancient art consumer, but also, incidentally, allowed the veil to escape the notice of traditional modern scholarship. From Greek literary sources, the author shows that full veiling of the head and face was commonplace. He analyses the elaborate Greek vocabulary for veiling and explores what the veil meant to achieve. He shows that the veil was a conscious extension of the house and was often referred to as ‘tegidion’, literally ‘a little roof’. Veiling was thus an ingenious compromise; it allowed women to circulate in public while maintaining the ideal of a house-bound existence. Alert to the different types of veil used, the author uses Greek and more modern evidence (mostly from the Arab world) to show how women could exploit and subvert the veil as a means of eloquent, sometimes emotional, communication. First published in 2003 and reissued as a paperback in 2010, Llewellyn-Jones' book has established itself as a central—and inspiring—text for the study of ancient women.”

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129), they are unwittingly condemning all Plain women who are not veiling their faces and only partially covering their heads.

### **Why the Need for 1 Corinthians 11:1–17?**

It is reasonable to ask what situation in the Corinthian church caused Paul to write this passage about head coverings. At bare minimum, it seems that at least some Corinthian women were partially removing their head coverings when praying or prophesying publicly. We are not told their reason. It seems highly unlikely that there was, as is sometimes claimed, a contingency of rebellious, “liberated women” in the Corinthian church who were rising up against strongly held, centuries-old Greek cultural norms.

Because Paul specifically mentions Corinthian women not remaining covered when *praying* or *prophesying*, it seems logical to wonder if some women, when they prayed or prophesied, were temporarily removing the part of their head coverings that veiled their faces, simply because those veils masked their mouths to some degree when they spoke. That would seem plausible. (Having worn a COVID mask, I can relate.) Why would they ever want to pull their head coverings completely off their heads when they prayed or prophesied? I struggle to think of a reason.

Regardless, in light of Greek cultural standards for women’s head and face coverings, one can understand why such an act might be of concern to those inside the church. And we should not be surprised that Paul addressed the issue. He did so by weaving divine principles within the context of cultural norms. If what Paul wrote was purely based on deference to culture, we could easily ignore it. But if what he wrote has its basis in divine principles (and it does), we should take it seriously and consider how to apply those divine principles within our own culture.

As I have already admitted, much of what Paul wrote in this passage raises questions for which I’ve never found satisfying answers. Commentators have come up with many contrasting conclusions that are sometimes constructed from questionable assumptions. But let’s at least take a stab at it.

### **The Disgraced Head**

According to Paul, one consequence of a woman being uncovered when praying or prophesying was that she “disgraces her head” (1 Cor. 11:5). Was Paul speaking of an uncovered woman’s *own* physical head, or was he speaking of her husband? Two sentences earlier, Paul referred to her *husband* being her *head*.<sup>18</sup> That sentence and the flow of Paul’s argument lead me to think

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18 See 1 Cor. 11:3. Ancient Greek did not have different words for “man” and “husband” or for “woman” and “wife.” Translators must look at the context to determine the best English equivalent. However, it is obvious that *every* man is not the head of *every* woman. Only husbands are heads of their wives; see Eph. 5:23.

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that the uncovered woman disgraces her *husband*. Is there any other indication that I'm correct on that? I think there is.

Paul goes on to say that the uncovered woman "is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved" (1 Cor. 11:5), a comparison that all the Corinthian believers must have understood but one that causes modern readers to scratch their heads. It certainly doesn't sound like a positive or desirable thing. What was Paul talking about?

It is often claimed that Corinthian prostitutes shaved their heads, but there is no historical proof of that claim. Moreover, it would seem odd that prostitutes, who were in the business of attracting men, would do something that would likely have the opposite effect.

A better explanation, and one supported by historical evidence, is that married Greek women who were found guilty of adultery had their heads shaved as a public shaming.<sup>19</sup> Such unfaithful women had removed their head covering and much more, and so as a shaming punishment for their immoral uncovering, their natural covering was removed by shaving their heads.

Tying this together, Paul may have been saying that a married woman who, against cultural norms, removes her covering before other men at a church gathering is acting like an adulteress by wrongly uncovering herself. No Greek husband would want his wife to remove her veil in front of other men. If she did, he would be insulted by her and humiliated before others. From a Christian perspective, her "head" (her husband) would be disgraced.

In that context, Paul reminded Corinthian Christians of divine principles regarding marriage, because those principles had application to the problem. Specifically, he pointed out that husbands are the heads of their wives and that wives should be subject to their husbands. Wives who remove their head coverings to commit adultery and wives who remove their head coverings at church gatherings to pray or prophesy are both out of line with God's divine order in marriage.

To try to make every aspect of 1 Corinthians 11:1–17 apply to modern, Western culture seems impossible, however, because Western cultural standards are so dramatically different from those in ancient Greece. Unless you are ready to advocate that all Christian women should be fully veiled in public, then the best we can do is to try to apply the biblical principles to marriage and church life within the context of modern culture. Unlike ancient Greek men, most modern, Western husbands do not expect their wives to be always

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<sup>19</sup> "It was well-known that women who committed adultery could have their head shaved as a sign of shame and humiliation. In fact, Meander (ca. 341–290 B.C.) once wrote a play set in the scene of Corinth, where a wife was suspected of having an affair, so her husband has her hair shaved off as punishment." (<https://theologyintheraw.com/the-cultural-context-for-the-hair-length-style-vs-head-coverings-debate-in-1-cor-11-the-meaning-of-kephale-part-12/#>)

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fully veiled in public, and nothing in Paul's words suggests that women's veiling is a divine mandate or principle.

### **The Modesty Question**

Although Paul never overtly mentions any issue of modesty in the passage under consideration, modern advocates of female head coverings often appeal to modesty as a primary justification. However, in doing so, Plain people have embraced a cultural view of female modesty that is a few hundred years old, and one that would have been condemned as grossly *immodest* in ancient Corinth. It would also be considered immodest in many parts of the world today, particularly those Muslim nations where women are expected to veil their entire faces.

Similarly, many modern Christian women who dress quite modestly by current cultural standards would have been condemned in centuries past. So modesty is obviously relative to time and place.

Plain and non-Plain Christians agree that female modesty does not require facial veiling. Yet they disagree on other standards of modesty. Should they devise lists of ordnung rules, separating from and condemning those who differ? No, they should walk in love and respect the convictions of others, just as the New Testament teaches.

Although two New Testament passages admonish women to be modest in general, and although Jesus warned all of us to avoid causing others to stumble, there are no specific instructions that tell us what is or is not modest. Again, a woman's degree of public modesty is a matter of personal conviction—within her particular culture, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with sincere respect toward other believers, and, if she is married, in deference to her husband.

### **Who Is to Blame When Men Stumble?**

Hyper-modesty advocates frequently lay the entire burden upon women to prevent men from lusting. That simply isn't fair. Abraham was afraid he might be killed by men who lusted after his beautiful wife (Gen. 12:14), even though Sarah dressed very modestly by any standards, always wearing a head covering that could be used, if necessary, to cover her face. Still, Abraham knew men would lust after her. There is nothing a woman can do to prevent that.

Jesus didn't say, "Whoever looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery in his heart, but no man should feel guilty about that, because it is always the woman's fault, usually because she wasn't dressed modest enough." No, God holds men accountable for their lust.

It's worth noting that a man can notice and appreciate a woman's beauty

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without lusting after her. Female beauty was God's original idea, and so was male attraction to female beauty. There is nothing wrong with either. As we saw earlier, Scripture describes Rachel and Esther as "beautiful of form and face" (Gen. 29:17; Esth. 2:7), suggesting that these aspects of their beauty were visible and apparent. Any man could appreciate Rachel or Esther's beauty without having to succumb to lust, just as a father might admire the beauty of his own daughter. There is no basis for equating beauty with immodesty.

### **But What About All the Divine Principles Paul Enumerated?**

We cannot ignore the fact that Paul appealed to divine principles in 1 Corinthians 11, though he applied them within the context of cultural practices. We should not ignore those divine principles. They lay down the divine order regarding gender and marital roles. Let me quote these verses below while leaving out the cultural applications:

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man [husband], and the man [husband] is the head of a woman [wife], and God is the head of Christ. ... For a man ... is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. ... However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God (1 Cor. 11:3, 7-12).

Those are timeless, unchanging truths that should be applied by followers of Christ at all times in every place. Their *application*, however, could vary at different times and places, depending on cultural practices. How they were applied in Corinth, Greece, in AD 60, for example—where culture dictated a certain degree of female modesty and public identification of marital status via women's head coverings—is not necessarily how they should be applied in Corinth, Kentucky, in AD 2025. If Paul were establishing a church today in Kentucky, I don't think he would require all the married women to start completely veiling their heads and faces in public and at church gatherings. But he certainly would admonish believing husbands and wives to follow God-given gender and marital roles.

If you were a Christian woman in first-century Corinth, it would have been reasonable for you to be asked to keep your head covering and veil on while praying or prophesying in public. If you are a woman in the United States today, you should keep your wedding ring on when you publicly pray or prophesy. In either time and place, you would be expected to dress modestly by your culture's standards. If your husband feels uncomfortable, or even disgraced by what you wear publicly, change it. Women who behave in this way will not transgress any of Paul's timeless truths.



# Chapter 16

## German Sermons and Missing Missions, Part 1

WBP? Chapter 7, pages 131-136

**O**ne indication of the new birth that I've consistently observed in those who are born again is their desire to share the gospel with others. They want everyone to experience the same spiritual resurrection they've experienced. They want everyone to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit and set free from their slavery to sin. They don't want any of their family and friends to go to hell. They know Jesus warned that, apart from the new birth, no one will see or enter God's kingdom (see John 3:1-16).

If you don't possess a desire for others to be born again, that is an indication that you have not been born again yourself. How could anyone who genuinely believes in Jesus remain unconcerned about people all around them who are weighed down by their sin and guilt and are on the road to hell? If those people would only repent and believe in the Lord Jesus, they would be on the road to eternal life! But as Paul wrote, "How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). That is what motivated Paul to preach the gospel.

The early Christians certainly possessed a concern for the lost. After the first persecution that arose in connection with the martyrdom of Stephen, Luke tells us that "they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria." He then says, "Those who had been scattered went about preach-

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ing the word"<sup>20</sup> (Acts 8:1, 4). God designed His kingdom to expand by the proclamation of the gospel. He equips apostles and evangelists with special gifts for effective evangelism to the masses, and He also equips ordinary believers with His love and the truth of His Word for effective evangelism to their family members, friends, and neighbors.

Like the first Christians, the early Anabaptists spread the gospel throughout their European towns and villages. One reason why they were persecuted to the point of being driven from their homes is that they were spreading the gospel. Their persecutors felt threatened by all the people who were leaving state churches to join the Anabaptist movement.

In contrast, Weaver and Zimmerman readily admit that Plain churches aren't making an effort to proclaim the gospel to the lost, either locally, nationally, or internationally. They offer several reasons for this phenomenon, but they fail to mention what is likely the primary reason: only genuine believers share the gospel. Only God knows how many Plain people, as well as Plain leaders, are not genuine believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, as indicated by their lack of concern for unbelievers. They may be religious ordnung keepers, but they have never been genuinely born again.

### **What is the Plain Gospel?**

In the New Testament, the word "gospel" appears over one hundred times. It literally means "good news." What is the gospel? What must people do to be saved?

I suspect that many Plain people would give a different answer to that question than Paul did when he was asked it by Philippian jailer. Paul's good news was, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). How simple! How biblical! It harmonizes perfectly with John 3:16.

If there is any Plain gospel, it is something like this: "Say that you believe in Jesus when you are baptized as a teenager, and then vow to keep the ordnung. Renew that vow twice a year for the rest of your life. If you do well enough at keeping the ordnung, you have a hopeful chance of getting into heaven. But no one can be certain of heaven before they die, and anyone who says that he is certain [like Paul, or like all the Anabaptist martyrs whose stories are preserved in *The Martyrs' Mirror*] is full of pride."

Plain people hear that "gospel" all their lives. So it is no surprise that they don't communicate it to people outside their own communities, or that Weaver and Zimmerman begin chapter 7 of *Why Be Plain?* with a criticism of non-

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<sup>20</sup> According to a note in the margin of the NASB, an alternate translation of this passage is, "those who had been scattered went about bringing the good news of the word." So they were not necessarily engaged in public preaching to crowds, but were sharing the gospel individually.

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Plain churches that, in their view, “over-emphasize” spreading the gospel:

The over-emphasis on missions and soul winning that came with the Great Awakening is splashed across almost all doctrinal and devotional books written by members of English churches (p. 132).

That sad statement certainly displays Weaver and Zimmerman’s disdain for missions, soul winning, and even the Great Awakening that swept tens of thousands of people into God’s kingdom and morally transformed the American colonies in the 1730s and 1740s. We certainly would never want to see that kind of “over-emphasis” ever again, would we?

Weaver and Zimmerman seem defensive on this point because, as they reveal, Plain church members sometimes ask Plain leaders, “Why aren’t the Plain People fulfilling the commandment of Christ to take the Gospel to all nations?” (p. 132). And that question can lead to Plain people leaving Plain churches to join churches that are involved in fulfilling Jesus’ Great Commission.<sup>21</sup> Of course, the entire reason Weaver and Zimmerman wrote *Why Be Plain?* is to try to stop the exodus from Plain churches. So they provide a tragic answer to that question.

### **The Tragic Answer**

Weaver and Zimmerman contend that Plain people—whom they earlier claimed “obey the Bible more literally than many other people” (p. 59) — aren’t called to obey Christ’s commandment to “Go ye therefore and teach all nations.” Perhaps other churches, they say, are called to obey the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20), but the Plain churches are not.

Then, even though it contradicts their statement that some churches may be called to obey the Great Commission, the authors next declare that Jesus’ Great Commission was given only to “the apostles and their generation,” and not to “the church down through the ages” (p. 133).

Yet Jesus’ very words in His Great Commission prove otherwise. He told His apostles to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations ... teaching them to observe *all* that I commanded you.” The Great Commission thus became one of the commandments the apostles taught their disciples to obey. It was a perpetual commandment for every generation, which makes perfect sense, since every new generation needs to hear the gospel and be discipled.

Attempting to further buttress their claim, Weaver and Zimmerman then state that the supernatural works done by the apostles—such as casting out of demons, speaking in other tongues, and healing the sick—all ceased “once

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21 The “horrible” phenomenon of Plain people leaving Plain churches to join soul-winning churches is the topic of Dan and Steve’s imaginary conversation at the beginning of chapter 7.

## *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*

the Christian faith was established” (p. 133). With that claim, the authors not only reveal their ignorance of the many times in recorded church history when those same miracles were evident among genuine believers, but they also show their ignorance of what is happening today outside the Plain bubble in which they live.

Demons are still being cast out, the sick are still being healed, and Christians are still speaking supernaturally in other tongues all over the world in Bible-believing circles. Literally hundreds of millions of Christians around the world have experienced the miracle of speaking in a language they have never learned, a phenomenon that is mentioned many times in the New Testament (see Mark 16:27; Acts 2:2–4; 10:44–46; 19:1–7; 1 Cor. 12:10, 28–30; 13:1; 14:1–28).

I am one of those hundreds of millions of Christians who, like the apostle Paul, am thankful that I speak in other tongues as part of my daily prayer life (see 1 Cor. 14:18). Three times in my life, Japanese-speaking people who have been present when I was praying told me that I was speaking in Japanese, and they even told me what I said! Every time I was praising God, yet I don’t know a single word in Japanese. The early church’s miracles have not ceased.

Nothing in the New Testament would lead any honest reader to think that it was God’s intention that His supernatural gifts to the church would cease with the first apostles.

### **Grasping at Straws**

Weaver and Zimmerman even claim that the healings and miracles God did through the original apostles began to cease near the end of Paul’s ministry, and to prove it, they cite two associates of Paul who Scripture says were sick: Epaphroditus and Trophimus. The authors fail to mention that Epaphroditus, who became ill because he “risked his life for the work of Christ” by traveling to bring an offering to Paul, was indeed healed (see Phil 2:25–30).

They also fail to mention that near the recorded end of Paul’s ministry, God was still working many miracles and healings through him. You can read about those miracles and healings in the final two chapters of the book of Acts.

Moreover, there is no biblical evidence that Paul or any of the early apostles could heal anyone anytime they wanted. “Gifts of healings,” which Paul listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8–11 along with eight other gifts of the Spirit, operate “as the Spirit wills” (1 Cor. 12:11; Heb. 2:4), not as people will. So the fact that Paul left Trophimus sick (2 Tim. 4:20) is no proof that God still wasn’t using Paul to heal others.

Additionally, the same Paul who saw Epaphroditus healed and who left Trophimus sick in Miletus wrote to the Corinthian believers, “For this reason

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many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world" (1 Cor. 11:30–32).

Therefore, sickness can be (though it is not always) an indication of God's discipline. Paul likely wrote those words to the Corinthians when he was in Ephesus around 53–55 AD, during a time when Scripture tells us that "God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out" (Acts 19:11–12). While some Corinthians were suffering sickness under God's loving discipline, God was doing extraordinary miracles of healing through Paul in Ephesus.

### **Not Everyone Is an Evangelist or Apostle**

Of course, most believers are not called to be apostles or evangelists, so they are not supernaturally equipped to preach the gospel to the masses or establish churches. They *are* called, however, to keep and to teach others to obey Jesus' commandments, as Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount:

Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps *and teaches them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:19, emphasis added).

Jesus also told His followers in that same sermon to "let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works" (Matt. 5:16). Amazingly, Weaver and Zimmerman use that commandment as a justification for *not* verbally proclaiming the gospel, as if sharing the gospel was not one of the "good works" Jesus had in mind. Paraphrasing a famous quotation that is often attributed to Roman Catholic friar St. Francis of Assisi, Weaver and Zimmerman write, "We should preach at all times, but only speak when necessary" (p. 135). That is like saying, "We should feed the hungry at all times, but only give them food when necessary."

Weaver and Zimmerman point out that so much of what the apostles wrote in their letters to the New Testament churches centered around holy living, and that very little of what they wrote was about spreading the gospel:

Many churches today stress missions and telling others about Christ as one of the most important parts of being a Christian. Why is this emphasis not found in the letters written to the churches?

Could it be because the church's form of evangelism is supposed to be their righteousness and godliness? (p. 134).

This is yet another exaggeration by Weaver and Zimmerman. Non-Plain,

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Bible-believing churches stress righteousness and godliness as well as evangelism. In fact, evangelism is a component of righteousness and godliness. Godly people love their neighbors as themselves, so they share the good news with them. And their holy lives give them a platform by which to share the gospel. Their transformed lives bear witness to the power of the gospel they proclaim.

But Weaver and Zimmerman believe that their only real obligation is to quietly live holy lives before the watching world:

When Christ told us to let our lights shine before men, He did not even mention words or telling others about Him. He specifically said our works will turn people to glorifying God (Matt. 5:16). A light, after all, does not make a lot of noise about its presence. It just shines and shows the way quietly. Not by their words, but by the love, peace, and unity they have among themselves (John 17:23) (pp. 135–136).

So our good works, which Jesus described as shining lights, have nothing to do with our words? Isn't telling the truth part of letting our light shine? What about letting "no unwholesome word proceed from our mouths, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear" (Eph. 4:29)? What about avoiding cursing, swearing, filthy speech and coarse jesting (Eph. 5:4)? It seems that the "silent light" analogy of Weaver and Zimmerman might be a bit of Scripture twisting. And is not sharing the transforming, saving gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ a "good work"?

In act, both Peter and Paul did highlight the importance of sharing the gospel verbally. First, here are Paul's words:

Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person (Col. 4:5–6).

And here are Peter's:

But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame (1 Pet. 3:15–16).

Those two passages describe responsibilities of ordinary believers, and they were written by two men who were both specially called and equipped by God to journey to distant places in order to proclaim the gospel and make disciples. Jesus builds His church through obedient ordinary believers as well as obedient apostles and evangelists.

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Why is God not calling and equipping any Plain apostles or evangelists to take the gospel to where it has not yet been heard? Could it be because Plain churches are promoting a “different gospel,” one that requires adherence to an archaic, enforced dress code, an abandonment of certain technologies, and the purchase of a horse and buggy?

### Appealing to Justin Martyr

In yet another desperate attempt to justify their idea that Christians should only “let their lights shine” via their “good works” rather than take any initiative to proclaim the gospel, Weaver and Zimmerman quote Justin Martyr, one of the early Christian writers. Justin penned his famous *First Apology* around AD 156, about 123 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus and about 56 years after the death of the apostle John. Weaver and Zimmerman write:

The following is what he [Justin Martyr] wrote about the church’s successful form of evangelism: “Some of them were won to Christianity by the righteousness they observed in the life of their Christian neighbors. Others were won by the extraordinary restraint Christian travelers displayed when they were cheated. Still others were attracted by the honesty of the Christians with whom they transacted business.”<sup>22</sup>

And that is how the Plain People believe people should be turned to Christ (p. 135).

All this is quite misleading. Justin Martyr’s *First Apology* was specifically addressed to “the Emperor Antoninus Pius, and to his adopted sons, Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, the philosophers. Also to the venerable Senate, and to all the people of Rome.” In other words, writing the *Apology* was part of Justin’s effort to proclaim the gospel to every Roman of his day!

Weaver and Zimmerman also skip over these words from Justin in his *First Apology*:

[God] is free from all impurity, and we [all believers] worship and adore him, and the Son who came forth from him and taught us these things ... and the prophetic Spirit. We [all believers] know them in reason and truth. *And we [all believers] freely share the things we [all believers] have been taught with all who wish to learn. ...*

*We [all believers] consider it important to teach these things to all people. In fact, the teachings of the Logos, because he is Divine, would have already touched most of mankind, if it were not for the wicked demons. ...*

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<sup>22</sup> This quotation is from page 83 of *We Don’t Speak Great Things—We Live Them!*, a modern English rendition of Justin Martyr’s *First Apology*, by Scroll Publishing (1989).

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David predicted the mighty word of Jesus that his apostles, going forth from Jerusalem, preached everywhere. Even though death is decreed against those who teach about Jesus, or even confess the name of Christ, we [all believers] still embrace his name and *teach about him everywhere* (emphasis added).<sup>23</sup>

Clearly, Justin Martyr's view regarding assertive evangelism was quite different from what Weaver and Zimmerman want us to think. The early Christians verbally proclaimed the gospel upon a platform of holy, righteous lives, resulting in genuine conversions to Christianity. Compare that with the Plain practice of "just letting our lights shine by our good works" and then answering an occasional question from those who are curious about Plain attire. If that is how Plain People believe people should be "turned to Christ," how is their belief working? How many outsiders are turning to Christ from observing the lives of Plain people?

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<sup>23</sup> This quotation is from pages 96, 98 and 122 of the same title.

# Chapter 17

## German Sermons and Missing Missions, Part 2

WBP? Chapter 7, pages 136-145

As we continue in chapter 7 of *Why Be Plain?*, it becomes clear that Weaver and Zimmerman recognize the virtual impossibility of winning people to faith in Christ through the Plain gospel:

There are other problems with the Plain People going on missions. One problem is that many Biblical ways tend to be dropped by the missionaries, including Plain dress, nonconformity, and avoidance of technology. When they [missionaries] come back the cry is, "We need cars, cell phones and other technology to reach the world. And we need to be more like the world so that the world is willing to join us." Discouraged with lack of converts, many mission-minded churches drop their nonconformity to the world to join them. Instead of the church winning the world, the world wins the church (p. 136).

That paragraph is enough to make the angels weep. What Weaver and Zimmerman call "Biblical ways" is nothing more than Plain traditions that serve as barriers to the gospel and to the salvation of people for whom Christ died. Why would any Plain people or Plain "missionaries" ever think they could make foreign converts when they make virtually no domestic converts in a nation where they number over 400,000 people? The same barriers that they erect in the United States, and that prevent just about anyone from joining them, would also prevent people of other nations from joining them. Yet for Weaver and Zimmerman, maintaining Plain traditions is more important than the salvation of the lost.

## *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*

And it only gets worse. After quoting Jesus' words to His followers that they are "the salt of the earth," Weaver and Zimmerman twist His sacred words to justify *not* evangelizing the lost! In the quotation below, I have added my comments in brackets:

Christ calls all Christians to be the salt of the earth, but if we lose our saltiness we are good for nothing. The more we become like the world [meaning, the more we don't wear Plain uniforms, and the more we use technology that we haven't historically used, and so on], the less useful we are to God in the building of His kingdom [His "Plain" kingdom]. And if we lose our saltiness [our Plain distinctives] we are good for nothing but to be cast out of God's kingdom and trodden underfoot by men [if we no longer keep our Plain traditions, we will forfeit heaven!]. If we are concerned about being a witness to the world, let's remember this: A church that is conformed to the world [that does not follow Plain traditions] is no witness at all. [So all non-Plain evangelism and missions are invalid witnesses to the world, because they aren't creating converts who conform to Plain traditions.]

History shows that when a group drops their nonconformity standards [Plain traditions of nonconformity that revolve around outward dress and use of some technology, as opposed to biblical standards of nonconformity], in a few generations they have become a worldly church [a church that doesn't keep Plain traditions] that neglects many Biblical principles [Actually, "ordnung rules." Notice Weaver and Zimmerman could not write "biblical *commandments*"]. Add a few more generations and many of them are no longer even Christians. In the light of that, how ridiculous would it be to drop many of our standards [Plain ordnung requirements] to evangelize other countries, only to potentially lose thousands of souls in our own following generations if the Lord tarries? (p. 137).

This passage reveals a common sentiment among most Plain groups. The focus is not on reaching out to the lost, but in preserving Plain culture. Plain groups aren't trying to attract outsiders. Rather, they are trying to keep insiders from escaping.

This reminds me of when I toured the border between East and West Germany years ago when East Germany was still a separate, communist nation. Along the East German border were multiple rows of high, barbed-wire fences. Guard towers were spaced along the fences, manned with soldiers with machine guns. Those fences were not designed to keep West Germans from entering East Germany, as no West German had any such a desire. They were designed to keep East Germans from escaping their own country. *The machine guns were pointed toward East Germany.*

If Plain leaders would ever tear down all the Plain fences and guard towers, tens of thousands of people would rush to cross the border, and everyone

## *German Sermons and Missing Missions, Part 2*

knows that. Only the strictest Scripture-twisting Pharisees would remain behind, clinging to their sacred man-made traditions. And every departing Plain person who was a true, born-again follower of Christ would not only continue to keep His commandments (as they had already been doing), while abandoning most of the man-made traditions, but would love to tell their story and God's story to anyone who would listen!

### **But It Gets Even Worse**

After telling their readers that they can be "the salt of the earth" while avoiding any form of soul winning or missions that compromises Plain traditions, Weaver and Zimmerman offer a final caution regarding the danger of Plain churches focusing on anyone but themselves:

And that brings us to another problem. There is much evidence that when foreign missions are the focus, the home church is frequently neglected.

*1 Timothy 5:8. "But if any provide not for his own, and specifically for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."*

*Galatians 6:10. "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."*

Those two verses command us to direct most of our energy to those of our own house and to those in the Christian faith. Our adversary, the devil, knows that if he can destroy the family and the church, the light of God's kingdom shining here on earth would be very dim. And if that's the case, the world will not be won regardless of how much preaching is done.

These problems are not given as excuses. All these problems we would gladly face and seek ways to make it work if we knew God wants us to go on foreign missions. But does He? We find nothing in the Bible that assures us He does (pp. 137-138).

I wonder what evidence Weaver and Zimmerman could present to show that "the home church is frequently neglected ... when foreign missions are the focus." Most Bible-believing churches around the world are involved in missions on some level because they recognize that God loves the entire world (John 3:16) and that Jesus died for everyone (1 John 2:2). Most of them support missionaries who are called and sent from their groups, or they assist indigenous groups. And their involvement in missions, foreign and domestic, does not result in neglect of the home church. On the contrary, it strengthens their unified obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The two Bible verses the authors quote have *nothing* to do with foreign missions, nor does either one imply a higher obligation to the local church than to missions. Both verses were penned by Paul, the greatest missionary in

## *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*

world history. The first was written to a fellow missionary, and addressed the obligation of Christians to provide for their widowed mothers and other widows who have no family support (see 1 Tim. 5:3–8). The second is simply an admonition to “do good to everyone,” and it explicitly is not limited only to “the household of faith.”

### **A Little Backpedaling**

Perhaps realizing how biblically unbalanced their downplaying of foreign missions is, the authors do backpedal a little bit, contradicting what they said previously. Under the subheading, “But Are Missions Never God’s Will?” they write:

We will not try to put God in a box and say He never calls a church to plant more churches overseas in areas where there are none. Very likely, He has called some to this work, and we’re not trying to say that it is wrong or unnecessary. We do have reason to question some of the methods and motives of modern missionaries, but we’ll leave that between God and them. It is true that Jesus criticized the Pharisee’s mission efforts, saying they cross land and sea to make one convert, only to turn him into twice as much a child of hell as themselves (Matt. 23:15). Jesus had the right to pass such judgment, but we do not.

Even though missions may well be God’s will for some churches, we believe the Plain Churches are called to be a light where they are (p. 138).

In light of their previous statements, it seems very doubtful that Weaver and Zimmerman are referring to any churches other than Plain churches in these two paragraphs. There are some churches that would identify as “Plain” and are also involved in overseas missions. The authors “have reason to question some of the methods and motives” of modern Plain missionaries, which, of course, is passing judgment. But they quickly attempt to hide their judgment behind a common cliché: “We’ll leave that between God and them.” If they were actually leaving it “between God and them,” they would never have written that they “had reason to question the methods and motives” of modern missionaries.

Then, the authors make another judgment of modern missionaries by referencing Jesus’ condemnation of the mission efforts of the Pharisees, as if that has some application to all modern missionaries. And then they again try to hide their judgment behind yet another cliché: “Jesus had the right to pass such judgment, but we do not.” Then why did they bring it up, especially when they just said they question the methods and motives of today’s missionaries? The reality is that Weaver and Zimmerman are trying to find fault with those who obey one of Jesus’ clear, important commandments which they nullify with their man-made traditions, something Jesus condemned (see Mark 7:1-13).

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### **Having an Answer**

Thankfully, at least Weaver and Zimmerman admonish their readers to share their faith with outsiders who question them about it. They caution, however, against sharing their faith when not asked:

Going around asking people, “Are you saved?” or “Are you a Christian?” probably does more harm than good and it does not fit in with Paul’s admonishment to live quietly and mind our own business (1 Tim. 4:11).

If Paul’s admonition to “live quietly and mind our own business” was meant to keep Christians from taking the initiative to share the gospel with others, then he clearly ignored his own admonition. By Weaver and Zimmerman’s definition, Paul certainly didn’t “live quietly and mind his own business.” His Christian life was devoted to proclaiming the gospel, and he “upset the world” (Acts 17:6). Riots broke out when he preached the gospel publicly.

Weaver and Zimmerman claim that because of Plain attire and lifestyles, Plain people are often given opportunities to share about their faith with people who ask them why they dress and live as they do. The authors admonish Plain people who are given such opportunities not to say that they are Amish or Mennonite but to say, “We are followers of Jesus Christ, trying to live out His commands” (p. 140). But the authors don’t tell their readers how to respond to the next logical question: “And does Jesus command people to dress like you and drive a horse and buggy instead of a car?”

Because “actions speak louder than words” (p. 135), it makes no difference if Plain people who are asked that question tell the truth or not, because their attire sends an unmistakable message to everyone: “To be a Christian, you must dress in uniforms like us, stop driving a car, and start driving a horse-drawn buggy. And a whole lot more.”

Dressing distinctively can perhaps attract some friendly inquiries, but implying that to be a true Christian one must dress in a certain way erects massive barriers to the gospel. Ordnung-based Plain tradition doesn’t help God’s kingdom grow; it hinders it. That is obvious from the number of outsiders who join Plain groups every year, which is no more than a handful, if any at all. Think about it—400,000 “Christians” who are allegedly “letting their lights shine” yet who collectively win no more than a handful of converts to their version of Christianity every year. Yet without shame, Weaver and Zimmerman, and all Plain leaders like them, advocate preserving the “Plain gospel” at all costs. We can’t help but wonder if Weaver and Zimmerman have ever experienced an authentic new birth.

### **German-Language Church Services**

Most Plain church services are conducted in German. Moreover, even if one speaks Pennsylvania Dutch—a German dialect commonly used by Amish

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people—that does not mean he understands formal German. That is, for example, why many Amish people will tell you that God’s first commandment was to “honor your father and mother.” They have heard a bishop or minister quote, from the German Bible, Paul’s words from Ephesians 6:2: “‘Honor your father and mother’ (which is the first commandment with a promise).” But they don’t understand the German for “with a promise,” and so they conclude that God’s commandment to honor one’s father and mother was His very first commandment.

In some Plain churches, everyone does understand German. But many participants at other Plain churches do not understand the language in which services are conducted, as former Amish people have explained to me. Nevertheless, tradition trumps the importance of ensuring that everyone actually understands what is said during Plain church services.

Weaver and Zimmerman don’t mention that particular problem when they acknowledge that holding church services in German creates another barrier to reaching outsiders with the gospel. That language barrier, however, doesn’t bother the authors:

If an English person wants to join a Plain Church he has a high barrier to cross [that is, he must learn German].

But in the words of a minister, the language barrier is not the biggest barrier he would have to face. The complete lifestyle change would be an even larger hurdle to face, which is why someone having the world’s comforts [ordnung-prohibited technologies] rarely desires to join us. But anyone is welcome to join. And if missionaries can learn another language to teach in other nations, a sincere seeker should also be willing and able to cross the language barrier (p. 141).

To paraphrase, the language barrier is just one of the many barriers that Plain churches erect to keep virtually all outsiders out, so why even consider eliminating it?

What is so tragic about that previous paragraph, and about all of chapter 7 of *Why Be Plain?*, is that the authors reveal their complete lack of concern for non-Plain people, for whom Jesus gave His life. Jesus was the consummate missionary and set the greatest example of love for the lost. He ate with greedy and dishonest tax collectors and other sinners because “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.” He “did not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17). He was the Good Shepherd who left the ninety-nine sheep to seek the one that was lost (Luke 15:3–7). And He sometimes told people who wanted to focus on their own family, “Allow the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim everywhere the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:60). He sometimes told people whose lives He touched not to be quiet, but to “Go home to your

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people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you” (Mark 5:19).

Paul, also a great missionary, removed every cultural barrier he could in hopes of reaching both Jews and Gentiles with the gospel (see 1 Cor. 9:19–23). In contrast, Plain leaders erect scores of cultural barriers to keep their churches “pure” and to keep outsiders away. Weaver and Zimmerman believe all the Plain barriers serve that good purpose. Keeping the English language out of Plain church services also helps to keep “the world” out of the churches. Again, the goal is not to reach the lost but to preserve those who are hopefully “saved.” Weaver and Zimmerman resort to twisting any scripture they can to support Plain exclusivity:

In 2 Thessalonians 2:15 and 3:6, the Bible mentions traditions and encourages us to cling to them—referring to traditions that help us live godly lives and remain distinct from the world. German sermons is [sic] such a tradition. It helps us to be separate from the world and cling to our conservative ways (p. 143).

Of course, there is no record that Paul, or any of the early churches, called for using a particular language in church services, let alone a language that some of the believers didn’t fully understand and one that no unbeliever understood—all in order to “keep the world out of the church”! The very idea stands against the most fundamental ethic of the Christian faith, which is to love one’s neighbor as oneself. If I love my neighbor, I will share the gospel of the Lord Jesus with Him, and I certainly won’t do it in a language he doesn’t understand.

When Paul admonished the Thessalonian believers to “stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught” (2 Thes. 2:15), he was not referring to hundreds of man-made rules and fence laws, but to biblical, Spirit-given precepts. In fact, the tradition Paul had in mind in 2 Thessalonians 3 was very clear:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother *who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us*. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example. For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread (2 Thess. 3:6–12).

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Clearly, the “tradition” to which Paul refers concerns working diligently to earn one’s own living, an application of loving one’s neighbor as oneself. The passage has nothing to do with man-made traditions, must less application to using the German language in Plain church services. But Weaver and Zimmerman continue with further Scripture twisting:

In the light of what happened to other churches that made this switch [from German to English church services], it is really worth the risk? Switch to English to make few converts from the outside and potentially end up losing more to the world than we manage to win for Christ? *“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”* (Matt 16:26).

Here, Jesus’ sacred words about the great value of eternal salvation are twisted to teach that it is better to build walls to keep the unsaved out than to tear down walls and risk being contaminated by others. May God have mercy on anyone who so violently twists Jesus’ words in Matthew 16:26.

Ironically, Weaver and Zimmerman wrote their defense of maintaining German-language church services in English, not in German—which shows that they acknowledge the value of communicating to their readers in the language that they best understand.

### **Thousands of Converts Every Year?**

In their final argument in chapter 7, Weaver and Zimmerman claim that because the Plain people double in number every twenty years, this shows they have “thousands of converts every year” (p. 144). This numerical growth, of course, is because Plain people generally have large families and most children born to Plain parents join the church as young adults.

But what this actually shows is that the only people whom the Plain churches can convince to join them are their own children, whom they program from birth to have a Plain worldview and on whom they place great social pressure in various ways, coercing them to make vows to remain Plain and keep the ordnung for the rest of their lives. Young adults are told at their baptism that they are now born again (when they actually may not be), and that keeping their vows to obey the ordnung is their only hope of eternal life. For the rest of their lives, they must observe hundreds of extra-biblical rules under the threat of excommunication, shunning by their own family members, and eternal hellfire.

What I have just described is not “thousands of Christian converts” but “thousands of children born inside a religious system that holds them captive all their lives.” Not only have Plain people attracted virtually no outsiders over the past 50 years, but thousands of people who were born Plain have

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left during that same time period, even when the group has done everything it can to stop that exodus—to the point of shunning family members who leave! What does that say about Plain churches?



# Chapter 18

## The Shunned Doctrine of Shunning, Part 1

WBP? Chapter 8, pages 147-159

The New Testament teaches that there are certain people whom Christians ought to avoid and even shun. Who are they? Weaver and Zimmerman explain the difference between how some church groups answer that question and how Plain groups answer it:

So while both more liberal churches and the Plain churches practice avoidance, there is a difference in who they shun. Like in most other things, the more liberal churches are more lenient, some of them only shunning those who have committed fleshly sins. But the Plain People believe that to use avoidance [shunning] as the Scriptures explain it, they must also punish disobedience to the church (p. 149).

Of course, when they say “disobedience to the church,” they mean “disobedience to the hundreds of man-made rules of the ordnung.” And the Plain practice of *punishing* (the word that Weaver and Zimmerman use) ordnung breakers should be no surprise. If you are going to have an ordnung, you must have a way to enforce all its rules. Without threat of punishment, there will be no compliance.

**Matthew 18:15–17**

Weaver and Zimmerman make their case using five Scripture passages, beginning with Jesus’ words in Matthew 18:15–17:

If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to

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you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that “by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed.” If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

It is obvious that Jesus was referring in this passage to confrontation for sins that are *personal offenses* (and not infractions against man-made ordnung rules). After His words, “If your brother sins,” some of the ancient manuscripts of Matthew add the words “against you.” That is why the KJV says, “If thy brother shall trespass *against thee*.” Also, Jesus said concerning the initial, private confrontation, “If he listens to you, you have won your brother.” That is, you are reconciled. So, the entire problem was a personal offense. That is obviously how Peter interpreted Jesus’ instructions in Matthew 18:15–17, as we find him asking immediately afterwards, “Lord, how often shall my brother *sin against me* and *I forgive him?*” (Matt. 18:21, emphasis added).

From this passage, we can conclude that it is proper to shun a brother if he meets four criteria: (1) He must be guilty of a personal offense against another brother. (2) He must have refused to acknowledge his sin after a private confrontation by the offended brother. (3) He must have refused to acknowledge his sin after a second confrontation by the offended brother and one or two “witnesses.” (4) He must have refused to acknowledge his sin after a third confrontation by the church. All four criteria must be met before he can appropriately be shunned.

Happily, most broken relationships are mended during the first confrontation as the offending party asks the forgiveness from the offended party. Or sometimes the offended brother realizes that the whole thing was a misunderstanding, or that he himself unintentionally caused an offense.

When the first confrontation does not result in reconciliation, the second or third confrontation often does. But even if not, Jesus did not say or imply that the shunning must be permanent. If the first three steps are all taken in the hope of achieving repentance and reconciliation, then it is safe to assume that the shunning should have the same goal in mind. Granted, to treat someone like “a Gentile and a tax collector” would seem to imply that anyone who resists three increasingly persuasive confrontations regarding their sin exposes himself as actually being an unbeliever. However, unbelievers can repent and be born again!

Most importantly, the basis for Jesus’ instructions in this passage is a *sin being committed*, or a transgression of one of God’s commandments. There is no indication that Jesus had transgressions against man-made rules in mind. But that is exactly what Weaver and Zimmerman make Jesus say: “So

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Jesus is saying that those who don't accept correction from the church [for infractions against the ordnung] must be expelled from it and shunned!" (p. 154). But that is not true. Jesus is saying that those who meet all four criteria He outlined should be expelled and shunned by the church. And it must all begin with a personal sin against a fellow church member. This passage has nothing to do with shunning ordnung breakers.

### **Another Twist**

Sadly, one instance of Scripture twisting leads immediately to another, more grievous one:

Referring to an offending member in the body (church), Jesus said:

*Matt 18:8. "If thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the everlasting fire."*

He is saying that the offending member must be cut off from the church lest his influence spreads and causes the rest of the church to be cast into hell. Elsewhere He taught that if the bad and unfruitful branches of the vine are not cut off, the fruit of the good will suffer (John 15:1-6) (p. 154).

To claim that Matthew 18:8 has any application to expelling and shunning church members is patently dishonest.<sup>24</sup> Let's read the verse in its context:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

"Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!

"If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.

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<sup>24</sup> Weaver and Zimmerman make the identical false claim regarding Matthew 5:29-30 and 18:8 on pages 165 and 167.

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“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost” (Matt. 18:1–11).

Did you see Jesus’ instructions in that passage about expelling church members who don’t obey church leaders? Neither did I. Just as in His Sermon on the Mount, when He spoke about cutting off a foot and plucking out an eye that cause us to stumble (see Matt. 5:27–30), here in Matthew 18:8 Jesus was talking about dealing with *personal* sin: “If *your* hand or *your* foot causes *you* to stumble.” He was also warning about those who personally cause children to stumble. His words have no application to church discipline and shunning.

The other passage that Weaver and Zimmerman cite similarly has nothing to do with church discipline. It states:

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned (John 15:1–7).

It does not seem possible that Weaver and Zimmerman could actually believe that John 15:1–7 has any application to church discipline, let alone excommunication by Plain leaders for transgressions against the ordnung. Nothing about church leaders is mentioned or implied in this passage. The only references are to Jesus, His Father, and the “vine branches.” God the Father, not church leaders, prunes the vines and judges the fruit. And fruit is produced in believers, not through the enforcement of hundreds of man-made rules by Plain leaders, but through abiding in Christ. Those who don’t abide in Christ will not bear any true fruit. In the end, they will be cast into the fire.

### **2 Thessalonians 3:6–14**

As they continue their quest for scriptures that support the shunning of those who don’t obey the ordnung, the authors next quote 2 Thessalonians 3:6–14:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone’s bread without

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paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example. For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good.

If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame.

Paul's instructions in this passage are to *all* the believers in Thessalonica, not just to the leaders. He tells all of them to avoid "every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us." According to the passage, the tradition of which Paul was speaking consisted of his own example and teaching regarding individual responsibility to work and provide for oneself, which is a specific example of how to love our neighbor. If we love our neighbor, we won't be lazy and expect him to work to provide for us.

These instructions should be followed by every believer today. If any professing Christian is unwilling to work and expects other Christians to provide for him, he ought to be avoided in order that "he will be put to shame." Hopefully, his shame will lead to his repentance.

The same principle applies to any other moral instructions Paul gave in any of his letters, as they, too, can all be summarized by the Golden Rule and the second-greatest commandment.

We should all seek to obey the Spirit-inspired instructions and commandments of the New Testament epistles, as they reflect the teaching of Christ, which can all be summarized by the Golden Rule and the second-greatest commandment. As we know by now, there are no instructions in the New Testament instructing church leaders to devise hundreds of extra-biblical rules and traditions, let alone to enforce those rules and traditions by threat of shunning. Yet Weaver and Zimmerman somehow extract that very idea from 2 Thessalonians 3:6–14:

This ... reinforces the teaching brought out from Matthew 18, that those who do not listen to a church that's striving to follow Christ's teaching [that is, a Plain church] must be shunned. The traditions are the guidelines [extra-biblical ordnung rules] the apostles had given to the church. Those who willfully disobey church standards [ordnung rules] and do not repent must also be shunned (p. 155).

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So a passage that instructs all believers to avoid lazy Christians who want to live off the charity of others is twisted to teach that the apostles devised an ordnung (“traditions” and “church standards”) that they enforced by shunning! This is a gross distortion of God’s Word.

### **1 Corinthians 5:1–12**

The third passage of Scripture to which Weaver and Zimmerman appeal contains Paul’s instructions to the Corinthian believers to expel a man who everyone knew to be living in an immoral relationship with his stepmother:

It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father’s wife. You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.

For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves (1 Cor. 5:1–12).

Although some commentators, such as Weaver and Zimmerman, claim that the immoral man was a Christian (see p. 156), the evidence in the passage indicates otherwise. Paul never refers to the man as a believer or Christian, but only as a “so-called brother” (5:11) and a “wicked man” (5:12). In just one chapter later, in 1 Corinthians 6, Paul declares that “the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God,” and he includes “fornicators” (better translated “sexually immoral”) in this group as well as “adulterers,” the “effeminate,”

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and “homosexuals” (see 1 Cor. 6:9–10). Finally, Paul expressed hope that the man’s expulsion would result in his “spirit being saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (5:5), so clearly Paul did not believe that the man currently had a saved spirit (even if he did at some point in the past).

In any case, everyone in the Corinthian church knew about the man’s immoral behavior and they were tolerating it. His perverse lifestyle was a terrible stain on the church of Jesus Christ. Outsiders who knew of the situation might easily conclude that one can be a Christian and also be sexually immoral.

Shocked by their toleration, Paul instructed the church to immediately expel the immoral man. He implied that they should expel any other false believers, including any who were immoral or covetous, as well as idolaters, revilers, drunkards, and swindlers (see 5:11). True Christians should not even eat with such persons if they claim to be Christians.

### **The Twist**

This passage offers no hint that church leaders should devise hundreds of man-made rules to enforce them by threat of shunning. Yet that is what Weaver and Zimmerman claim.

Before we consider their argument, I should point out that Weaver and Zimmerman often refer to Paul’s lists of “exclusionary sins”<sup>25</sup>—found in 1 Corinthians, Galatians and Ephesians—as “sins unto death.” Paul never used that phrase in connection with his exclusionary lists, and I don’t think the authors use the phrase correctly, particularly in light of how the apostle John used it:

If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death (1 John 5:16–17; KJV).

If the sins in Paul’s “exclusionary lists” are all “sins unto death,” then we should not pray for any Christian whom we see commit any of those sins, which would seem to indicate that all the sins in Paul’s exclusionary lists were unpardonable. But we know that isn’t true. For that reason, most Bible interpreters see the “sin unto death” as a certain unpardonable sin, such as the sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit (see Luke 12:10).

Let us now consider Weaver and Zimmerman’s commentary on 1 Corinthians 5:1–12, in which they focus on a few of the exclusionary sins listed by Paul in a desperate attempt to find support for their thesis that ordnung breakers should be shunned:

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<sup>25</sup> Paul declares that those who practice the “exclusionary sins” that he lists in 1 Cor. 6:9–10, Gal. 5:19–21 and Eph. 5:3–5 “will not inherit the kingdom of God.

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1 Corinthians 5 is often used to support lenient avoidance—that only the sexually immoral, drunkards, and sinners of that degree should be shunned [rather than also those who transgress Plain ordnungs]. And yet, questions arise even in this short list of sins unto death (see verse 11).

The first word we'll look at is "covetousness." To be covetous is to desire or intensely long for something one cannot or should not have. So let's say some Peter joins a Plain church and promises to uphold their guidelines [ordnung rules] and those things that the church has agreed on as Scriptural [even though they can't be found in Scripture]. The church is now accountable for him and his Christian walk. And he's accountable to the church, and is under the authority of the ministry [church leaders] as the Bible teaches.

But with a little time Peter starts looking around and his discontentment with nonconformity starts growing. Those in that liberal church down the road have things so nice and easy. Instead of driving a pluggy horse they can hop in a car and soon be where they're going. The tools they allow would make his work so much easier.

Finally, Peter gives in to his desire and chooses to leave this church with so many restrictions. The ministry admonishes him to not give in to the love of the world [that is, "love of the world" by Plain definition] but he refuses to listen. He rejects their authority and disregards his accountability to the church to attain more worldly [by Plain definition] possessions.

Is that covetousness—a sin unto death? It's something to consider. In the ten commandments we are told not to covet our neighbor's ox. Is it any better to covet his car? (pp. 158-159).

Hopefully, you spotted all of the faulty assumptions and logical flaws in those paragraphs. The two most obvious ones are the authors' misleading definition of covetousness and their related arbitrary forbidding of some material things (a feature of all Plain ordnungs). According to the authors, anyone who desires anything church leaders have arbitrarily forbidden is guilty of covetousness, which is a "sin unto death" that will send them to hell. What a stretch!

Imagine if I said to you, "I've decided that owning more than ten cows is a sin, so anyone who desires more than ten cows is guilty of the damning sin of covetousness, and they will go to hell if they don't repent of that desire." You would probably say to yourself, "Who does he think he is?" Then, imagine if I saw you with eleven cows and told you that you are on the road to hell, and that to help you be saved, I would be shunning you until you repented by getting rid of your eleventh cow. I doubt you would be persuaded that the eleventh cow was keeping you out of heaven. But that is what Plain leaders do all the time when they set arbitrary standards as to what church members may possess.

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Plain leaders defend themselves by claiming that all the church members agree on the ordnung rules and declare their agreement twice a year. However, we all know what happens to anyone who dares to disagree. He is branded as “divisive” and “not submissive to church leadership,” and he soon finds himself “under the bann.”

### **What Is Coveting?**

Weaver and Zimmerman say that to covet “is to desire or intensely long for something one cannot or should not have.” But *who decides what one cannot or should not have?* The authors assume that church leaders have the authority to set those standards, yet we can’t find any of the apostles setting standards restricting any material thing. They, like Jesus, instructed their followers to avoid laying up earthly treasures and instead to lay up heavenly treasures, but they did not specify what constituted earthly treasures.

Weaver and Zimmerman write, “In the ten commandments we are told not to covet our neighbor’s ox. Is it any better to covet his car?”

The authors confuse coveting what belongs to my neighbor with desiring to possess what is not my neighbor’s. The Tenth Commandment is not a prohibition against purchasing or owning an ox. It is a prohibition against *coveting my neighbor’s ox*. Everything God listed and prohibited the Israelites from coveting in the Tenth Commandment was something that *belonged to a neighbor*. If God meant that we can’t *possess* anything that our neighbor possesses, then it would be wrong for me to be own *any* house, field, ox, or donkey if my neighbor happened to own any of those (see Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21).

If my neighbor owns a car, I am certainly forbidden from coveting *his car*, but I am not forbidden to buy or own my own car. Coveting my neighbor’s car could lead to jealousy, hatred, or even theft or murder, none of which are compatible with loving my neighbor. But there is nothing evil about me buying my own car, or buying a car that is identical to my neighbor’s, or even buying my neighbor’s car if he desires to sell it.

Weaver and Zimmerman’s imaginary scenario of “some Peter” joining a Plain church is similarly flawed. Why? Because that scenario rarely occurs, for the simple reason that very few adults would ever join a group that demands conformity regarding hundreds of minor details of their lives for no justifiable moral or biblical reason. That being so, why didn’t Weaver and Zimmerman use a realistic example? The only people who do join Plain groups are those like Weaver and Zimmerman, who were born into Plain families that taught them Plain ideas from childhood and that exerted immense social pressure on them to join their Plain churches. Socially pressured teens who want to get married are hardly comparable to “some Peter” who, as a sober and informed adult “outsider,” joins a Plain group.

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I suppose that if “some Peter” did join a Plain church and knowingly agreed to follow the ordnung, then he certainly would have no right to complain when church leaders expect him to keep his vows. But that still doesn’t make his desire to own a car covetous in God’s eyes. He would be covetous only in the eyes of Plain church leaders—the ordnung police—who not only have confused coveting what belongs to someone else with simply desiring to own the same thing, but who have also set arbitrary and non-biblical standards regarding what one can and cannot possess.

So far, we’ve covered three of five Bible passages Weaver and Zimmerman deploy in an effort to show why ordnung breakers should be disciplined. In the next chapter, we’ll look at the final two.

# Chapter 19

## The Shunned Doctrine of Shunning, Part 2

WBP? Chapter 8, pages 159-170

As Weaver and Zimmerman continue their attempt to justify shunning Ordnung breakers, they continue redefining words that Paul used in 1 Corinthians 5:1–12, just as they did regarding the word “covetousness.” The authors redefine some of Paul’s “exclusionary sins” by claiming they are actually prohibitions against disobeying church leaders, which of course is a “sin unto death.” For example, the next sin they define from Paul’s list in 1 Corinthians 5:11 is “railer”:

The word we’d use today [for the KJV “railer”] is “reviler”. This is a person who verbally tears someone down, perhaps with accusations, insults, or slander.

So, what if someone reviles the ministry [church leaders], accuses them of something like hypocrisy, and tears them down verbally? If that isn’t reviling, then what is? (p. 159).

It seems as if the authors may have had some experience with people they would label as “revilers.” Perhaps they would call me a reviler for finding fault with their book. Regardless, their obvious implication is that criticizing Plain bishops and ministers can be an alleged “sin unto death” that demands excommunication and shunning. There is, however, a big difference between accusing Plain ministers of evident false teaching or hypocrisy—what could be an act of obedience to Jesus’ commandment to “Beware of the false proph-

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ets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matt. 7:15)—and the sin of being a reviler.

The definition of the verb "to revile" is to "criticize in an abusive or angrily insulting manner." Jesus was reviled by some who watched Him die on the cross (see 1 Pet. 2:23). Revilers unjustly find fault. Jesus found plenty of faults with the scribes and Pharisees, but He never committed the sin of being a reviler.

No Christian should associate with a reviler who professes to be a Christian. But to claim that anyone who, having evidence, accuses a bishop or minister of false teaching or hypocrisy is a "reviler" constitutes a gross twisting of Paul's warning.

### **Galatians 5:19–21**

Weaver and Zimmerman continue to define other alleged "sins unto death" as they move from 1 Corinthians 5 to Paul's list of exclusionary sins in Galatians 5:19–21, which Paul labels "deeds of the flesh":

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Weaver and Zimmerman claim that "it is the responsibility of the church to punish these sins to help the sinner to repentance and to keep the church pure" (p. 160). Actually, however, Paul says nothing in this passage about the church "punishing" these sins. In fact, nowhere in the New Testament are churches or church leaders instructed to punish sins. Beyond that, *just six verses later* Paul wrote, "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

Paul seems to have thought that the sins he listed would be quite rare in the church. That should be the case if, generally speaking, the true believers were avoiding those who were practicing the "deeds of the flesh," as Paul implies that they should do in 1 Corinthians 5:11. When the majority of the church members, or even a large minority of them, are practicing the "deeds of the flesh" and the rest are tolerating it, that's a sign of a church full of unregenerate members. The solution to that problem is the new birth and the Word of God, not ordnungs.

Coming back to Paul's warning regarding the deeds of the flesh in Galatians 5:19–21, any godly church leader would do the same as Paul. That is, he would proclaim the gospel and also warn his church members that those who practice the deeds of the flesh will not inherit God's kingdom. Usually, when church leaders preach holiness, those who are not genuinely born again and

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who don't want to repent just remove themselves. They don't feel comfortable around people who are following Jesus. However, in the event that they don't remove themselves, a good shepherd would personally confront them. At that point, such folks will either repent and become born again or leave the fellowship.

### **A Redefinition of Idolatry**

Next, Weaver and Zimmerman redefine idolatry (also found in Paul's exclusionary list of sins in Galatians 5), claiming that "rejecting the guidelines of the church can be idolatry, since the Bible says covetousness is idolatry (Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:5)" (p. 160).

They base this far-fetched idea on their previous, erroneous claim that desiring or owning anything that the ordnung forbids is covetousness. And, since covetousness is idolatry according to Colossians 3:5 and Ephesians 5:5, that means (to Weaver and Zimmerman) that desiring or owning anything that the ordnung forbids is also idolatry. And since idolatry is a "sin unto death," desiring or owning anything that the ordnung forbids should be punished as idolatry by church leaders.

This inventive scripture twisting serves to justify the undue authority that Plain leaders exercise over their churches. Disobeying them, or the arbitrary rules of the ordnung, is a "sin unto death."

Moreover, according to Weaver and Zimmerman, "Refusing to accept correction from the church [leaders] is also [idolatry]." Why? Because Weaver and Zimmerman have found an Old Testament verse, 1 Samuel 15:23, that says, "Stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry" (p. 160).

Here, Weaver and Zimmerman extract an Old Testament verse from its context to exploit it for their intended purpose. Any resistance to correction from church leaders and their ordnung rules becomes a manifestation of "stubbornness," which makes it also idolatry. It is yet another "sin unto death" related to submission to church leaders and man-made rules, punishable by excommunication and shunning.

But is this really what Paul was thinking when he listed idolatry in Galatians 5 as one of the sins that can result in one not inheriting God's kingdom? And wasn't the stubbornness of which the prophet Samuel spoke—recorded in 1 Samuel 15:22–23 and cited by the authors—related to disobedience to *God's* clear instructions rather than man's? Besides, isn't the stubbornness of *church leaders* who refuse to listen to the clear teaching of Scripture because of their devotion to Plain tradition also idolatry?

### **A Redefinition of Witchcraft**

Employing the same Old Testament verse from 1 Samuel, Weaver and Zimmerman next equate non-submission to church leaders with witchcraft, another "exclusionary sin" Paul lists in Galatians 5:

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The Bible says, “Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry” (1 Sam 15:23). Is rebellion against the church [leaders] like witchcraft in God’s sight? Is refusing correction idolatry? We cannot take this lightly (p. 161).

Perhaps Weaver and Zimmerman realize that they are pushing the limits of plausible Scripture interpretation, so they exercise a small amount of caution by asking a question rather than making a declaration. But they seem to imply that rebellion against ordnung-enforcing church leaders is equivalent to witchcraft, and that refusing correction from ordnung-enforcing church leaders is equivalent to idolatry. Another incredible stretch of logic and Scripture.

### **More Redefined Sins**

Chapter 8 of *Why Be Plain?* continues with similar reinterpretations of the specific “deeds of the flesh” Paul lists in Galatians 5:19–21. In the end, 7 of 17 deeds (in the KJV) are redefined so as to relate to not submitting to ordnung-enforcing church leaders or causing disunity in the church in some way.

For example, when the authors mention “variance” (the eighth deed in the list in the KJV), they rightly define it as “quarreling and contentions,” but they connect this behavior only to church relations: “These types of people in the church cause endless problems and cannot be left unpunished [by excommunication and shunning] lest they tear asunder the church” (p. 161).

When the authors mention “emulations” (ninth in the KJV list), they rightly define it as “jealousy and envy,” but again they describe it only in church relations. They tell their readers that “another way envy can cause problems is when members are jealous of the authority of the ministry. Like Korah, they might gather against the leaders and try to take church matters into their own hands” (p. 161).

The message is unmistakable to those who might entertain the idea of not submitting to church leaders: when Korah and his followers rebelled against God-ordained leadership, “the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up” (Num. 16:32). Those who challenge Plain church leaders will similarly be cast into hell.

When the authors mention “strife” (#11 in the KJV), they once again describe it only by reference to church relations: “Those who stir up conflict and disunity in the church are not lead [sic] by the Spirit, but by the flesh” (p. 161). Does strife never occur outside of churches?

“Seditions” (#12 in the KJV) is properly defined as “causing dissension and division,” and the authors warn, “Those who stir up dissension and conflict in a Scriptural church [that is, a Plain church] are guilty of a sin that the Bible

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says cannot enter God's kingdom" [sic]. It must be perfectly okay to stir up dissension and conflict in a non-Plain church!

"Heresies" (#13 in the KJV) are properly defined as "factions" (as the word is translated in the NASB) or a "sect, which is a group within the church who divide themselves from the rest of the congregation" (p. 162).

Can you see the pattern? In this rendition, anyone who causes disunity in the church is to be expelled, and when a church has hundreds of man-made rules and traditions, questioning any of them is "causing disunity," a "sin unto death," and grounds for excommunication. This is why Plain leaders wield so much authority and why Plain people cower under their authority. To not submit to them and the ordnung they enforce is a sure ticket to hell.

Weaver and Zimmerman summarize all they've written regarding the 17 "sins unto death" listed in Galatians 5:19–21 by saying,

So there we have Paul's list of wickedness that cannot enter God's kingdom [sic]. And in 1 Corinthians 5 he wrote, "*Put away from yourselves that wicked person*" (p. 162).

That gives Plain leaders the right to rule without challenge and to excommunicate and shun those who question them or any rule of the ordnung. And that opens the door to various forms of abuse that go hidden and unreported to the outside world. Thousands of ex-Plain people have heartbreaking stories of abuse, and tens of thousands of currently Plain people could tell you theirs if they weren't fearful of doing so. I am reminded of the famous words of Lord Acton: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

### **Two Final Scriptures on Avoidance**

The next New Testament passage that Weaver and Zimmerman cite to justify shunning and excommunication for transgressions against the ordnung is Titus 3:9–11:

But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.

Although Paul called for the expulsion, after two warnings, of those who cause strife and disputes because of their fixation on "foolish ... unprofitable and worthless" controversies regarding genealogies (most likely, Jewish genealogies) and the Mosaic Law, Weaver and Zimmerman find application to anyone who engages "in controversies and quarrels," which, of course, would be anyone who questions the ordnung or Plain traditions. Such people should be "expelled from the church and shunned" (p. 164).

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The last passage cited is Romans 16:17:

Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.

When Paul mentioned “teaching which you learned,” he was referring to Holy Spirit–inspired, biblical, gospel teaching, not unbiblical human traditions based on scripture twisting and flawed logic. However, Weaver and Zimmerman, certain that the Plain churches are the only ones that are scriptural, write:

This does not mean that it is a sin to divide a “church” that has divorced Christ and married the world [that is, churches that allow car driving, certain technologies, and don’t enforce a Plain dress code. It is OK to divide them by promoting Plain traditions.]. However, stirring up division and strife in a Scriptural church [that is, a Plain church with a Plain ordnung] falls under the Bible’s list of sins unto death (pp. 164–165).

So anyone who challenges Plain leaders or Plain ordnungs is hell-bound. Is it any wonder why many who understand Plain leadership structures view Plain groups as destructive cults?

### **If You Love God, You Will Shun Your Own Children**

Plain groups all practice varying degrees of shunning, and Weaver and Zimmerman appear to practice an Old Order Mennonite version. In their version, shunning involves not eating, drinking, or doing business with a shunned person, and “withdrawing from him as a spiritual brother in Christ.” But that does not mean avoiding him completely or not helping him if he has a need (see pp. 166–167).

Some Plain groups practice milder or more severe versions of shunning. I’ve heard of Plain groups who allow shunned persons to eat with them, but they require the shunned to sit at a different table separated by one inch from the main table. I’ve also heard of groups in which parents tell their shunned children not to attend their funerals.

The most tragic aspects of this shunning by Plain groups is that it consistently occurs over ordnung issues rather than biblical issues. And it is an even greater tragedy when such shunning is directed at members of one’s own family. That has happened countless times, which Weaver and Zimmerman admit “can be a heavy cross to bear” (p. 166).

When Weaver and Zimmerman attempt to explain why shunning rarely seems to bring the shunned person “back into the fold,” they blame church members who “do not fully believe in shunning and [who] sympathize with the sinner, strengthening him in his error” (pp. 168–169). ‘

## *The Shunned Doctrine of Shunning, Part 2*

The actual reason why that phenomenon exists is because many, if not most, Plain people believe that shunning others over ordnung issues is unbiblical nonsense, but they are caught between their natural love for the shunning victims and their fear of being shunned themselves for not shunning the victims.

Surely, most Plain people believe in their hearts that it is wrong to shun former Plain church members who are active members of non-Plain churches and who are striving to obey Jesus' commandments. They know such people are not on the road to hell, no matter what Plain leaders may say. But they are slaves to their Plain traditions, which require them to shun even their own adult children who begin attending non-Plain churches. They rob themselves of relationships with their own grandchildren! I wonder: what will they say to those children and grandchildren when they see them in heaven?

Weaver and Zimmerman want to perpetuate the grievous Plain practice of shunning family members who have transgressed man-made rules, and all under the guise of love for God:

Abraham was asked to kill his own son. Why? It was a test to prove to God that Abraham loved the Lord above all. While shunning certainly isn't putting anyone on the altar, it can feel cruel, especially when it must be applied to friends and family. But the church must at times make this sacrifice, shunning their own erring sons and daughters to show that God is foremost—yes, even above their own children. Obedience to God is more important than pleasing those who have stumbled (p. 169).

That could be the most tragic paragraph found in *Why Be Plain?* Think of all the families that have been broken and robbed of one of the greatest blessings God has given to humanity, all because of man-made, unbiblical traditions perpetuated by Plain leaders, like Weaver and Zimmerman, who nevertheless claim that the ordnung promotes unity. How God's heart must grieve over this unbiblical, man-made practice!



# Chapter 20

## Government Entanglement, Part 1

WBP? Chapter 9, pages 171-193

All Anabaptists generally believe that in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus introduced new laws for the new covenant, laws that uphold a higher moral standard than what is found in the Law of Moses. That premise is based on Jesus' six statements that begin with either "You have heard that it was said" or "You have heard that the ancients were told" (Matt. 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43). Jesus then always mentions a law or teaching derived from the Mosaic Law, followed by a counterpoint that always begins with the words, "But I say to you" (Matt. 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44). For brevity's sake, henceforth I will refer to them as "Jesus' six statements."

Weaver and Zimmerman certainly hold to the common Anabaptist view of Jesus' six statements, as indicated by two paragraphs in chapter 9 of *Why Be Plain?*:

In some of the next Scriptures Jesus says something like, "Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time," meaning it was an Old Testament or Jewish law. Then Jesus says, "But I say unto you," meaning He is now setting forth a new standard for the New Testament Christians. He then proceeds to set a higher and stricter one.

This is something many Christians of today don't understand. They think Jesus came to remove all laws. Yes, Jesus took away the Old Testament sacrificial and sacramental laws, but instead of taking away the law of moral standards, He actually set stricter ones. For example, in the Old

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Testament it was wrong to commit adultery. Jesus did not take away that law. He set a higher one and said anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has committed adultery! (Matt. 5:27–28) (p. 177).

Twice in the above quotation, Weaver and Zimmerman claim that Jesus set “higher” and “stricter” moral standards. But the example they give raises questions about their claim. They imply that during Old Testament times, adultery was wrong but lust was not. Lust did not become a sin until Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Is that true?

In this chapter, I will not address every subject that Weaver and Zimmerman mention in chapter 9 of *Why Be Plain?* Rather, I will examine—in the light of Scripture—the premise that Jesus introduced higher moral standards in His Sermon on the Mount. Much of Anabaptist theology, including much of what Weaver and Zimmerman advocate, is built on that premise.

### **A Caution**

First, we should not automatically assume that Jesus was altering or upgrading part of the Mosaic Law just because He referenced something from the Mosaic Law and then said, “But I say to you.” It is possible that Jesus’ disciples had heard something that was incorrect or incomplete, and Jesus was correcting or completing their understanding.

For example, imagine a police officer saying to you, “You have heard that robbing a bank is illegal, but I say to you that stealing anything that belongs to another person is illegal.” You would not assume the officer was informing you about recently enacted laws that conveyed a higher moral standard. Rather, you would understand that he was elaborating on the theme of theft, helping you to understand that robbing a bank is not the only example.

Jesus once did that very thing when He was speaking to His disciples. He used the phrase “but I say to you” to communicate to them that their understanding regarding a certain topic was incomplete:

And His disciples asked Him, “Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?” And He answered and said, “Elijah is coming and will restore all things; *but I say to you* that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished” (Matt. 17:10–12, emphasis added).

Jesus fully affirmed the truth of what His disciples had heard from the scribes about the coming of Elijah, but He then revealed something the scribes had missed, namely that Malachi’s prophecy that God would send “Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord” (Mal. 4:5) was partially fulfilled by the ministry of John the Baptist. So, in this case, “But I say to you” meant, “Your understanding is partial, so let me tell you more.” As we read Jesus’ six statements, we should not rule out the possibility that

## *Government Entanglement, Part 1*

He was, in fact, *not* introducing new laws with higher standards but, rather, correcting their misunderstanding of old laws found in the Mosaic Law. And that is especially likely since Jesus introduced all six of His statements with these words:

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, *not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law* until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:17–20, emphasis added).

Although those introductory words don't preclude the possibility that Jesus established standards that *exceeded* those found in the Law and Prophets, they do preclude the possibility that Jesus' six statements might *contradict* the Law of Moses or any of the Prophets. To *contradict* what is found in the Law and Prophets is equivalent to *abolishing* what Jesus said He would not abolish.

Beyond that, if Jesus contradicted anything found in the Law and Prophets, He contradicted Himself, as He, being God, was the divine author behind both. Additionally, for God to contradict Himself or change His view on fundamental moral principles would require a change in God's essential character, which is impossible.

As an illustration, imagine someone suggesting that during the old covenant, God wanted His people to always tell the truth, but that under the new covenant, He expects them to tell the truth only when they swear on a Bible. In all other instances, lying is acceptable. Such a suggestion would obviously amount to a divine moral downgrade. Of course, no one would accept such a suggestion as valid, as it would imply a fundamental moral character change in God Himself. God cannot lie (Tit. 1:2; Heb. 6:18). Thus lying (particularly when used to gain advantage over or harm someone) cannot be morally acceptable to Him, ever.

The same would be true if anyone suggested a reversal of the above example, such as teaching that under the old covenant God expected His people to tell the truth only when they swore on the Bible, but that under the new covenant, He expects them to always tell the truth, which would be a divine moral *upgrade*. Such a teaching would imply that, at one time, some lying was acceptable to God, which would in turn imply that God Himself has undergone moral improvement such that lying, unlike previously, is now always unacceptable to Him. For the same reason that we would reject the suggestion of a divine moral downgrade, we should also reject the suggestion of a divine moral upgrade.

## *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*

As we consider Jesus' six statements with these thoughts in mind—thoughts based on what is revealed in the *entirety* of Scripture—we are better able to correctly interpret them. We should be highly suspicious of any interpretation according to which Jesus altered fundamental morality, effectively pitting Himself against the Mosaic Law, His Father, and Himself.

Regarding each of the six statements, we will ask two questions.

First, when Jesus referenced something from the Law of Moses, did He accurately quote a specific commandment, or was He referencing what the scribes and Pharisees taught? In none of the six cases do we find Jesus saying, "The Law of Moses says . . ." Rather, He says, "You have heard . . ." So what His audience had heard may or may not have been an accurate reflection of what was taught in the Mosaic Law. And if Jesus was raising the standard, we would expect that He would correctly reference the old standard before revealing the contrasting new standard.

The second question we will ask concerning each of Jesus' six statements is this: Was the alleged "new standard" Jesus introduced actually a standard that cannot be found in the Mosaic Law? If a standard Jesus advocated *can* be found in the Mosaic Law, then it was not a new standard.

### **Jesus' First Statement**

Let's begin with the first of Jesus' six statements:

You have heard that the ancients were told, "You shall not commit murder" and "Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court." But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, "You good-for-nothing," shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, "You fool," shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering (Matt. 5:21–24).

Did Jesus accurately cite the Law of Moses?

Yes and no. "You shall not commit murder" is found in the Ten Commandments, but "Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court" is not found anywhere in the Mosaic Law. It must have been something Jesus' audience heard from the scribes and Pharisees, and in light of Jesus' counterpoint, their teaching seems to have focused only on deterring murder while ignoring those things that lead to murder and that are, in themselves, lesser forms of murder. Jesus contrasted the appraisal of a human court with the appraisal of God's court, a much stricter court that sometimes sentences the guilty to hell.

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Was the standard Jesus prescribed a new standard that cannot be found in the Mosaic Law?

Consider the fact that no honest person would ever think God's original prohibition against murder, found in the Mosaic Law, was a divine allowance to strangle someone—provided that the strangler released his chokehold just in time for his victim to gasp for air and barely survive. And if that chain of logic is traced to its logical beginning, we realize God's prohibition of murder included a prohibition of the anger and hatred that can lead to murder, as well as venomous words that often precede murder. God doesn't want anyone in the "murder groove." His original prohibition against murder was also a prohibition of hatred.

Moreover, God has *never* wanted anyone to be in the murder groove, because He has not changed and neither have His fundamental moral standards. There was never a time prior to the Sermon on the Mount when God would have approved of an Israelite bringing an offering to the temple who had a broken relationship that could be repaired. The second-greatest commandment was to love one's neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18), so it obviously superseded any obligation regarding temple offerings.

To claim that Jesus was raising the standard in Matthew 5:21–24 is to claim that the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself is not found in the Mosaic Law, and that during the old covenant, hating one's neighbor, and spewing hateful words at one's neighbor were acceptable to God. We can specifically read in the Law of Moses, "You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him" (Lev. 19:17). Under the old covenant, God forbade hatred in the heart.

It is therefore safe to conclude that Jesus was not, in His first of six statements, raising the moral standard. He was simply elaborating on the existing standard that was not only evident in the Mosaic Law, but in every human conscience.

### **Jesus' Second Statement**

You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery"; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell (Matt. 5:27–30).

Did Jesus accurately cite the Mosaic Law's standard?

## *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*

Yes. However, as with the first statement, He elaborated on the implications of that standard.

No one would ever think that God's prohibition against adultery was a divine allowance to engage in a sexual relationship with your neighbor's wife, just as long as it didn't go as far as intercourse. And if we trace that logic to its beginning, it is obvious that God's prohibition of adultery included a prohibition of what always precedes adultery, namely lust.

God does not want anyone in the "adultery groove," and He has *never* wanted anyone in that groove, because He has not changed and neither have His fundamental moral standards. There was never a time prior to the Sermon on the Mount when God would have approved of an Israelite man lusting after another man's wife, committing adultery in his heart. In fact, lust was prohibited in the Tenth Commandment: "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife" (Ex. 20:17).

Moreover, Job, who most likely lived long before the Mosaic Law but who had a God-given conscience, said, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?" (Job 31:1). Lust has always been a sin.

Lust, like murder, is also a violation of the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself, a commandment found in the Mosaic Law. Therefore, lust was a sin under the old covenant.

To claim that Jesus was raising the standard in Matthew 5:27–30 is to claim that lust was acceptable to God under the Mosaic Law, which is absurd. He was not introducing a new, higher moral standard in this case.

### **Jesus' Third Statement**

It was said, "Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce"; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery (Matt. 5:31–32).

Of course, the topic of divorce and remarriage is hotly debated within Christian circles. But my purpose in this chapter is to determine whether the standards Jesus set in His six statements were a moral upgrade to the Mosaic Law. So we will stick with our two questions.

Did Jesus accurately cite the Law of Moses?

No. "Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce" cannot be found anywhere in the Mosaic Law, although it is likely derived from Deuteronomy 24:1–4. Jesus' counterpoint leads us to think that He was actually citing the lax teaching of the scribes and Pharisees, who apparently emphasized the importance of divorce certificates while ignoring the sin of illegitimate divorce.

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We know that many, if not the majority, of Pharisees in Jesus' time believed that a man could divorce his wife for any reason at all, as indicated by their questioning Jesus over that very issue (see Matt. 19:3), as well as by the historical evidence for the rabbinic debate at the time regarding what constituted an "indecency" for which the Mosaic Law apparently allowed divorce (see Deut. 24:1-4).

Was the standard Jesus prescribed a new standard?

If we conclude that it was, we must assume that Jesus' decree, "Everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery," would *not* have been true under the Law of Moses. That would mean that under the old covenant, God allegedly found no fault with the man who divorced his wife for reasons other than unchastity, and that such a man was not guilty of making his ex-wife "commit adultery" when she remarried.

We know that under the Mosaic Law, God did find fault with the man who divorced his wife for reasons other than unchastity. We read in Malachi:

"This is another thing you do: you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. Yet you say, 'For what reason?' Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. But not one has done so who has a remnant of the Spirit. ... Take heed then to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of your youth. For I hate divorce," says the Lord, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the Lord of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously" (Mal. 2:13-16).

In this case, God referred to divorce as "treachery" because Israelite men were breaking their marriage vows when they divorced "the wives of their youth," apparently to marry younger women. To claim that Jesus was establishing a new, higher standard, now making divorce lawful only for unchastity, whereas it was formerly lawful for any reason is to claim that God did not speak through the prophet Malachi.

In short, Jesus was not establishing a new standard regarding lawful divorce; rather, He was elaborating on the existing standard established in the Mosaic Law (not to mention the law of conscience). This is further proved by the fact that in every other instance when Jesus equated divorce and remarriage to adultery, He clearly had the Law of Moses in view, just as in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matt. 5:17-20).

For example, when the Pharisees questioned Jesus about the lawfulness of

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divorcing one's wife for any cause (Matt. 19:3–9), they were asking whether, *according to the Mosaic Law*, it was lawful to divorce for any cause. They even cited the Mosaic Law's provision for divorce in their later argument. The entire conversation was framed within the Mosaic Law, and it took place during the era of the old covenant when the Mosaic Law was still in force. When Jesus said to them, "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery," none of them thought to themselves that He was establishing a new, higher standard. Rather, they all naturally assumed He was elaborating on the true standard of the Mosaic Law.

This is perhaps even more obvious in Luke's record of one of the incidents when Jesus equated divorce and remarriage to adultery:

*The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail. Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery (Luke 16:16–18, emphasis added).*

Clearly, the third sentence in that passage illustrates the concept presented in the first two sentences. Prior to John's preaching the good news that the kingdom of God was at hand, anyone who preached in Israel was preaching from the Law and Prophets. John, however, had an exciting new message that became very popular, so much so that it overshadowed the Law and Prophets in many people's minds, making them irrelevant. Jesus experienced the same misconception regarding His own preaching (Matt. 5:17).

However, Jesus strongly condemned such a view, saying that in spite of what anyone might think, it was easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail. The Law and Prophets were still *very* relevant. Adultery was still a sin. So was breaking a marriage covenant. Thus, "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery."

This is one more proof that Jesus' third statement in the Sermon on the Mount did not mark the establishment of a new, upgraded moral standard but simply elaborated on the old standard found in the Law of Moses.

### **Jesus' Fourth Statement**

Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, "You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord." But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth,

## *Government Entanglement, Part 1*

for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, “Yes, yes” or “No, no”; anything beyond these is of evil” (Matt. 5:33–37).

Did Jesus accurately cite what the Mosaic Law had to say about making false vows?

Yes. Although He may not have quoted it verbatim, He certainly expressed the spirit of the Mosaic Law regarding vows (see Lev. 19:12; Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21, 23). God expected the people of Israel to keep their vows.

Was Jesus establishing a new standard that can’t be found in the Mosaic Law?

Some say yes because of Jesus’ words, “But I say to you, make no oath at all.” And if that was what Jesus said, that would be a new and different standard. However, that is *not* what Jesus said. He said:

But I say to you, make no oath at all, *either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.* Nor shall you make an oath *by your head*, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, “Yes, yes” or “No, no”; anything beyond these is of evil.

Jesus was not forbidding the making of vows and oaths, which are nothing more than promises or declarations of what one will do. What could be evil about that? In fact, saying “Yes, yes” is a vow.

Was Paul sinning when he wrote to the Corinthians, “I will come to you after I go through Macedonia. ... But I will remain in Ephesus until Pentecost” (1 Cor. 16:5, 8)? Was he sinning when he promised Philemon that he would repay any debts incurred by his new convert, Onesimus (Philem. 18–19)? Are marriage vows displeasing to God? Are salvation vows by which a repentant sinner tells God he is turning from his sin forbidden?

No, Jesus was clearly forbidding the practice of making oaths by swearing by something, such as heaven, earth, Jerusalem, or one’s head. That was the common practice of the scribes and Pharisees, as revealed by Jesus’ own words about them recorded in Matthew 23:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ... blind guides, who say, “Whoever swears by the temple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple is obligated.” You fools and blind men! Which is more important, the gold or the temple that sanctified the gold? And, “Whoever swears by the altar, that is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering on it, he is obligated.” You blind men, which is more important, the offering, or the altar that sanctifies the offering? Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. And

## *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*

whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it" (Matt. 23:15–22).

Pathetically, Israel's spiritual leaders had concocted a method that made lying lawful. One only needed to know the pharisaic intricacies of the rules governing the swearing of oaths.

So again, in this fourth statement, was Jesus establishing a new and higher standard?

Such a claim would imply that under the Mosaic Law, lying was sometimes acceptable to God—which would contradict not only the Ninth Commandment but scores of other scriptures that clearly establish God's expectation for truthfulness. Numbers 30:2 would have to be interpreted to actually mean, "If a man makes a vow to the Lord, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth, *except when he does so by swearing on the temple, the altar, or heaven. In those cases, lying is acceptable.*"

Moreover, although Revelation 21:8 says that all liars will be cast into the lake of fire, if you were a liar under the Law of Moses, you would be lucky that God's standard was different back then! Additionally, the guilt felt in the consciences of every person who lied prior to the Sermon on the Mount would actually be false guilt that had no origin in God.

So far, we've covered four of Jesus' six statements. We'll cover the final two in the next chapter.

# Chapter 21

## Government Entanglement, Part 2

WBP? Chapter 9, pages 171-193

**B**uilding on the previous chapter, let's consider Jesus' fifth "You have said ... but I say to you" statement:

You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you (Matt. 5:38–42).

Did Jesus accurately cite the Mosaic Law?

Yes, the words "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" are found three times in the Mosaic Law (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21).

Was Jesus' counterpoint a moral upgrade?

At first glance, one might think so. Note, however, that in each instance where the phrase "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" is found in the Mosaic Law, it is contained within instructions related to Israel's *civil* law. More specifically, they are found within instructions that regulated Israel's court system. God expected Israel's judges to administer justice.

The most obvious example of this is found in Deuteronomy 19. In the passage quoted below, I have italicized sections that verify the judicatory context:

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A *single witness* shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of *two or three witnesses* a matter shall be confirmed. If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the Lord, *before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days. The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you. Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot* (Deut. 19:15–21, emphasis added).

In none of the three places when “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth” is found in the Mosaic Law could it be rightly interpreted as a command for *individual* Israelites to take personal revenge for offenses committed against them. In fact, the Mosaic Law clearly forbade taking any personal revenge (which is one reason God established a court system in Israel):

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord (Lev. 19:18).

Vengeance is Mine, and retribution (Deut. 32:35).

To recap, Jesus first quoted a civil statute from the Mosaic Law that charged court judges to administer justice, a statute that specifically referenced *non-trivial* offenses (“life for life, eye for eye”). Within that same Mosaic Law was a prohibition against individual Israelites taking personal revenge, so there is no way that the “eye for an eye” passages could be viewed as instructions for individual Israelites to take personal revenge. Then Jesus told His followers not to take revenge for offenses that were *trivial* by comparison to those listed in the “eye for an eye” passages. Moreover, He told them to offer their petty offenders an opportunity to do twice the harm they intended.

So we have a choice of interpretations. First, we could conclude that Jesus did not know that the “eye for an eye” instructions in the Mosaic Law had no application to His followers outside of Israel’s civil law, and that He was unaware that the same Law forbade His followers from taking personal revenge. We could assume that because of His ignorance regarding these matters, He thought it was time to correct the low moral standard of the Mosaic Law (of which He was the divine author). So, in a grand, divine moral flip-flop, He abolished the alleged law that required individual Israelites to take personal revenge for major offenses, and from the Sermon on the Mount onward, He would expect His followers never to do what the Mosaic Law allegedly required them to do, taking no revenge not even for petty offenses.

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Or we can conclude that Jesus was alluding to the perverse teaching of the scribes and Pharisees—just as He had done in his previous four statements, in which he corrected their twisted teaching—in that they misapplied the “eye for an eye” passages in the Mosaic Law to justify revenge even for petty offenses. We might also conclude that Jesus was affirming that whereas Israel’s divinely established court system was designed for non-trivial offenses (such as murder and maiming), God expected trivial offenses such as cheek-slapping to be met with mercy that shames the offender.

The second of those two interpretations would seem most plausible, especially in light of the fact that the concept of mercy-shaming one’s offenders is an Old Testament ethic:

If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; You will heap burning coals on his head. And the Lord will reward you (Prov. 25:21-22).

Mercy-shaming one’s enemies is also contained in the Mosaic Law:

If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him; you shall surely release it with him (Ex. 23:4–5).

Honest readers of this passage who lived under the Mosaic Law would extrapolate the moral principle there and find application to other situations where they might “overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21). Pity the pathetic Israelite who saw his enemy’s *horse* lying helpless under its load and said to himself, “I’m glad that isn’t a donkey, or I’d have to do something.”

In summary, the claim that Jesus was introducing, in His fifth statement, a moral upgrade to the Mosaic Law is simply not true. Jesus was only correcting the perverse twisting of the Mosaic Law by the scribes and Pharisees while affirming the ethic found in the Law.

By the way, Paul would agree that the ethics of not taking revenge and mercy-shaming one’s offenders have not changed from the old to the new covenant. Here are his own words to new covenant believers:

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. But “if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink, for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:19–21).

In that passage, Paul quoted twice from the Old Testament (Deut. 32:35; Prov. 25:21–22), showing that he believed that the new covenant ethic was identical to the old covenant ethic. There was no upgrade. In His fifth statement, Jesus was not introducing a higher ethic.

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### **The Sixth Statement**

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:43–48).

Did Jesus accurately cite the Law of Moses?

Yes and no. If your New Testament translation capitalizes Old Testament quotations, Matthew 5:43 looks like this: “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.” The Mosaic Law certainly instructed the Israelites to love their neighbors, but it did not instruct them to hate their enemies. In fact, as we have already seen, it instructed them to love their enemies in certain situations, shaming their enemies by showing them underserved mercy and returning good for evil.

So once again, Jesus was citing not the Mosaic Law but what His audience had heard from their teachers, the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus’ counterpoint seems to indicate not only that the scribes and Pharisees taught their students to hate their enemies, but that their “neighbors” whom the Law commanded them to love were only those people who loved them.

Clearly, Jesus was not establishing a higher moral standard but affirming the old standard—a standard that God not only revealed in the Mosaic Law but has always been teaching all the earth’s inhabitants through His own example. Long before the giving of the Mosaic Law, God had been causing His sun to rise on the evil and good and sending crop-growing rain on the righteous and unrighteous, two examples of loving His enemies. This natural revelation is yet another reason why it is absurd to claim that loving one’s enemies is a new, higher moral standard introduced by Jesus. God has expected people to love their enemies from the very beginning, and He included that standard in the Mosaic Law.

### **New Covenant Sins That Were Not Old Covenant Sins?**

To claim that Jesus was introducing new, higher moral standards in these six statements is to claim that prior to the Sermon on the Mount, all of the following were acceptable to God: (1) spewing venomous, hateful words against one’s brothers; (2) elevating ceremonial laws above moral laws, as exemplified by the act of presenting a sacrifice at the altar even when one knew he had a broken relationship; (3) lustfully looking at another man’s wife; (4) divorce for any reason, as long as one gave his wife a divorce certifi-

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icate; (5) lying; (6) taking personal revenge for even minor offenses; and (7) hating those who have caused offense.

A cursory reading of the Mosaic Law should show the grave error of such a conclusion. All seven items in my list above would be violations of God's commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself, an old covenant law. Thus, none of them would have been acceptable to God even prior to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In other words, *Jesus could not have been introducing new, higher moral standards.*

Beyond this, one would expect—if Jesus did morally upgrade the Mosaic Law—that the apostolic authors of the New Testament epistles would have mentioned such an important theological and moral fact. However, not only do they *never* mention it, but they actually refute it, affirming old covenant ethic premises—just as they were originally written—as binding upon their new covenant readers.

For example, I've already cited Romans 12:19-21, in which Paul quoted two Old Testament passages to support his prohibition of revenge and his admonition to love one's enemies. Paul indisputably believed both ethics predated the Sermon on the Mount, and for good reason: because they did!

Another example is the Old Testament commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18), a commandment Jesus referred to as one of the two greatest. It is also the single greatest *social* commandment (law regarding relationships with others) of the old covenant. It was carried over from the Law of Moses to the Law of Christ, as shown by its endorsement by Christ (who told His disciples to teach their disciples all that He commanded them), as well as by its endorsement by the apostles Paul and James in their epistles to new covenant believers. The Old Testament commandment that Jesus said is the second-greatest in the Mosaic Law is superseded by no higher ethic in the new covenant, again conclusively proving that there has been no moral upgrade.

James wrote:

If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well (Jas. 2:8).

Here, James referred to the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself as the "royal law," clearly elevating it above all other laws, and he informed his new covenant readers that they were "doing well" if they were fulfilling it. He did not call on them to keep a higher social or moral standard than what was found in the Mosaic Law.

The apostle Paul similarly believed the new covenant believer who loves his neighbor as himself "does well," as he fulfills all the other social commandments of the Mosaic Law. Paul, like James, did not hold his readers to any

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higher social or moral standard than what was found in the Mosaic Law. To the Roman Christians he wrote:

Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, "You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:8–10).

To the Galatian Christians, Paul similarly wrote:

For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Gal. 5:13–14).

If Paul or James believed God had radically altered or upgraded the moral ethics revealed in the Mosaic Law (as Anabaptists like Weaver and Zimmerman want us to believe), why did both of them hold up these summary statements contained in the Mosaic Law as the standard their readers should strive to attain? Why did they, along with all the other authors of the New Testament epistles, never mention that the moral standards of the new covenant were higher than those of the old covenant?

To buttress their argument regarding the alleged higher standards of the Sermon on the Mount, some Anabaptists appeal to passages in the New Testament epistles that speak of the passing of the Mosaic Law with the demise of the old covenant and the inauguration of the new covenant. As we have just seen, however, although it can rightly be said that the ceremonial aspects of the Law of Moses are no longer binding, it cannot rightly be said that the moral and social ethics found in the Law of Moses have ceased to be binding, as those ethics predate the Law of Moses (being found in every human conscience) and were clearly carried over into the Law of Christ.

Thus, when we read Anabaptist prooftexts such as Hebrews 7:12, "For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there *takes place a change of law also*," we can be sure that the author is speaking of changes in the laws regarding the Levitical priesthood, not laws of fundamental ethics and morality. Under the new covenant, none of the laws that regulated the Levitical priests are relevant, as the Levitical priesthood has ceased. We have a new High Priest after the order of Melchizedek (see Heb. 7).

### **One Final Argument**

But what about the "new commandment" that Christ gave to His apostles, a commandment to love one another, even as He loved them (John 13:34–35)? Was Jesus not establishing a higher ethic with a higher standard than what was found in the Mosaic Law?

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“New,” of course, does not necessarily mean “superior,” “higher,” or even “different.” It just means “new” as in “not existing before.” Up to that point, Jesus had not told any of His followers to love each other as He loved them. He had only told them (through the Mosaic Law) to love their neighbors as themselves and to love their enemies.

But how did Jesus love His disciples? He loved them perfectly according to the standard He had given in the Mosaic Law, loving them as He loved Himself. So Jesus’ new commandment was just a rephrasing of an old commandment. Instead of stating, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” or “Treat others just as you want to be treated,” Jesus said, “Imitate Me.” That new commandment was *slightly* different in that it specifically addressed whom His followers should love: not their “neighbors” or “others” but one another.

Jesus repeated the same new commandment to His apostles a short time after He first spoke it, further elucidating His meaning:

This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends (John 15:12–13).

John referenced this statement in his first epistle:

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? (1 John 3:16–17).

We can see that “laying down our lives for the brethren” does not necessarily refer to literally dying on their behalf, but rather to making sacrifices on their behalf, an ethic that certainly existed prior to Jesus’ words in John 13 and 15. The Mosaic Law was full of requirements for the people of Israel to make sacrifices on behalf of their fellow Israelites, particularly on behalf of the poor, whom John also highlighted.

### **The Irony**

What is perhaps most ironic about those who believe Jesus upgraded moral standards in His six statements in the Sermon on the Mount is that their interpretations of those allegedly higher moral standards sometimes require the transgression of what allegedly must be “lower standards.” For example, Anabaptism’s unique theology regarding nonresistance, based on Jesus’ words about not resisting an evil person, requires Anabaptists not to use any force to stop evil people from harming others. But this “act of love” toward perpetrators entails an act of hatred for the victims, in that it violates the commandment to love one’s neighbor as oneself.

Similarly, the unique theology of some Anabaptists regarding divorce and

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remarriage, based on their interpretation of Jesus' words in which He equated divorce and remarriage to adultery, requires new Anabaptist converts to divorce their spouses and break up their families if they have previously been married and divorced—hardly an act of love toward their current spouses and common children, and one that requires them to break their marriage vows, repeating their previous sin. But Anabaptist theology about divorce and remarriage is all based on the premise that Jesus upgraded the related standards, and that therefore the old covenant standards can be ignored. On the contrary, they should not be ignored, because Jesus was not upgrading them.

Jesus delivered His Sermon on the Mount during the time when the old covenant was still in force, several years prior to the inauguration of the new covenant at His death and resurrection. If His most famous sermon was a revelation of new laws for the new covenant, laws that reflect a higher moral standard than what was found in the Mosaic Law, did Jesus actually not expect His audience to obey those commandments until after His death and resurrection? Or was He expecting them to live up to standards that are unique to the new covenant while still living under the old covenant? Did people in His audience who were living up to the old covenant standards and thus were righteous before God suddenly become unrighteous when the standards were upgraded that day? Were people who had been on the path to heaven suddenly transferred to the path to destruction? Anabaptists and their spiritual counterparts have no answer to these questions.

In conclusion, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was not an abrupt upending of the morality and ethics God had been teaching every person since Adam, strangely making unacceptable what had been acceptable to Him for millennia. It was not the New Testament equivalent of King Rehoboam's ratcheting up of Solomon's standards when he told the people of Israel, "Whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions!" (1 Kings 12:11).

In contrast, Jesus placed on His disciples a yoke that is easy (alternatively translated "comfortable" or "pleasant") and a burden that is light (Matt. 11:30) by focusing their energies on simply loving God and neighbor, and by empowering them through His indwelling Holy Spirit.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was a renewal and restatement of what God had already revealed from the beginning through every rain shower and sunrise (Matt. 5:44–45), through the voice of every person's conscience (Rom. 2:14–16), and through what Jesus referred to as "the weightier provisions" of the Mosaic Law, namely "justice and mercy and faithfulness" (Matt. 23:23). Any interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount that contradicts God's revelation through creation, conscience, and the crucial moral elements of the Mosaic Law should be rejected.

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Once we grasp that Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was not the introduction of a moral upgrade but, rather, a recovery of fundamental moral principles found in the Mosaic Law, then we can interpret it properly within its biblical context. It must be interpreted as harmonious with the Mosaic Law.



## Chapter 22

### Something Is Very Wrong

The back-cover text of *Why Be Plain?* states that “the ‘purpose of [being] Plain’ is obedience to Christ.” Plain ways, it claims, “are grounded on the teachings and commandments of Jesus Christ.” The whole purpose of Plain ordnungs, the authors assert, is to help Plain people “live out His commandments” (p. 22).

Unfortunately, however, many stories told by current and former Plain people reveal a dark underbelly of Plain life that is hidden from outsiders and swept under the rug among insiders.

One of the first of such stories I heard—from several sources—concerned a local Amish bishop who had been placed under the bann three times for molesting his daughters and granddaughters. Not long after, I learned about two local Amish men who were sentenced to prison for pedophilia. Then, I received newspaper accounts of men in Plain communities elsewhere in the country who were also serving prison time for similar crimes. After that, I read books several written by former Plain women who told horrific stories of sexual abuse by their brothers and fathers or neighbors.

Wondering just how pervasive this problem was, I decided to conduct a survey of Plain and former Plain people about their experience with child sexual abuse (CSA). I announced that survey on my Facebook page. Because I have many Plain and former Plain Facebook friends, we have received 486 responses as of this writing.

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About 90% of those who participated in our survey were former Plain, and about 10% were current Plain. 64% were female and 36% were male. 38% were age 41 or older, 58% were age 21 to 40, and 4% were 20 or younger.

Here are the responses to three of the questions:

**“Were you a victim of sexual abuse as an Amish/Old Order/Plain child or teen?” Yes: 49%; No: 51%**

**“Do you personally know someone, besides yourself, who was such a victim?” Yes: 86%; No: 14%**

**“Have you ever heard someone confess, to any degree, in a church gathering, to victimizing a child or teen?” Yes: 21%; No: 79%**

Obviously, our survey was not scientific or randomized. We don’t know if victims or non-victims were more likely to have participated. For that reason, we certainly cannot conclude that 49% of all Plain people are victims of CSA. Nevertheless, the responses indicate that CSA is a significant problem that has been hiding for a long time within some Plain communities.

Some of my Amish friends have claimed that CSA is far worse in the broader world than within Plain culture. I certainly hope so.<sup>26</sup> But *why is there any CSA in the Plain world?*

Jesus said, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea” (Mark 9:42). That statement reveals what Jesus thinks of anyone who causes a child to stumble for *any* reason. Certainly, the horrific act of CSA would be at the top of the list of evils that might cause a child to stumble and be scarred for life. In the world, those who are found guilty of CSA are sentenced to years, and often decades, of prison time, because even the world understands how wicked, vile, and perverse such a crime is.

### **CSA Victims Speak**

At the end of our survey, we asked an open-ended question: “Please tell us anything else you feel would be important for us to know.” Below is a sampling of 40 of the 172 responses we received. All 40 have given us permission to publish their anonymous comments, which depict what has been happening in some Plain communities. After presenting these comments, I

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26 In the United States overall, one in every four girls (25%) is a victim of CSA, as is one in every thirteen boys (8%). If proving that the Amish world is doing better than the English world is important to some readers for some reason, I suggest that they conduct an anonymous survey of adults in their own community. They will need to do a significantly-sized random sampling with anonymous participation for accurate results. Of course, those results will only be relevant for their community, not the entire Plain world.

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will add some closing words for both victims, perpetrators, Plain leaders, and all readers.

If you have lived in a Plain community where CSA is not an issue, then thank God. You should not be offended by this chapter. Rather, have compassion for victims like those below who share their stories in their own words.

This first testimony I hope is representative of the majority of Plain people:

*I had an amazing childhood with a godly father and grandfather whom I will be eternally grateful for.*

Three others offered similar comments. The vast majority, however, were like those that follow. The first three are from women who are currently living in Amish communities:

*1. A very good friend of mine was sexually abused, and she said something to the ministry [bishop and/or ministers]. They asked her abuser about it. He admitted to it, and he had to make a confession in church. But then his abuse continued, and she reported it again. The ministry told her to leave it, saying that he had confessed and is free now. She was put under the ban for a year for bringing it up again. She is no longer Amish.*

*It needs to be drilled into the Amish culture that sexual abuse needs to stop. ... It just gets swept under the carpets. We need to educate the Amish women and children how important it is to report any form of sexual abuse.*

*2. I have \_\_\_ siblings. At least 7 of us were either victims or perpetrators. My mom found out about it by questioning me, but there was no action taken to end the abuse.*

*Through the mercy of God, I have found healing on a scale that only a loving and powerful God can accomplish. I truly am blessed because my husband is kind and very compassionate. We are still Amish; however, the church we attend is different from many other Amish churches, and we have the freedom to follow the Word and the Spirit. Many of my friends have been abused. It's a plague everywhere and the Plain people have no immunity against it; rather, they seem more vulnerable than most. So sad.*

*3. I have a very traumatic past. I've suffered every kind of abuse that there is, and to this day I am really struggling with PTSD, different anxiety disorders, and depression. And YES I need help to this day!! But what I'd like to say is PLEASE!! in some way give the victims help and let them know they have a voice and to use it!!!! Currently, for myself, I'm still trying to find it and not feel guilty!! I am \_\_\_ years old and only getting into seeking help for about 2 1/2 years. ... I feel stuck in many ways!! May God bless you as you continue to reach out to those hurting and abused souls!!*

All of the remaining testimonies that follow are from former Plain people. They are not, however, angry "Plain-bashers." They are precious people who

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either suffered CSA themselves or care about CSA victims whom they know. Many left their Plain communities not because they “succumbed to the lure of the world,” but because they had to escape to a safer place.

4. *We were excommunicated from our Amish community because we sided with victims. A 15-year-old girl who was abused by her grandfather was also excommunicated at the same time as us. She has since spoken of how many of her cousins were involved. ... I believe this is a shocking issue that the Amish shrug at!*

5. *Whether I was sexually abused is a complicated question for me as it was inappropriate play from my friends that they initiated, but I was a fairly willing participant, as I had no sexual education at all. That sexualized playing around resulted in a very enlarged imagination and misery for me from the time I was 8 years old. Unknown to me at the time, being the youngest in my large family, there was a horrible level of ongoing abuse amongst most of the male family members against their siblings and animals.*

*At 16, I myself personally intended to rape my sister four years older than me; I had convinced myself that she would want it. Thankfully, she was older and more mature than me and her response shattered any delusions that she would want it. Her reaction revealed to me my utter sinfulness and utter wickedness of my heart, and it never went farther than me grabbing her dress. I contemplated suicide to exterminate the wickedness that was clearly overtaking me and destroying me; I was a horrible slave to sin. But God, through His Spirit, led me to Romans 7 and 8 over the course of the next several days, and I felt a faint glimmer of hope. I cried out to God (if He was real) to teach me what the Apostle Paul experienced in his transition from being a slave to sin, to being set free from slavery, to living a life of victory. If God wasn't real or able to get through to me, then suicide was my plan as a fitting check against the evil forces.*

*As we know, God is faithful. I was born again and set free!*

*Most of my siblings are still some form of Amish, and they will not be able to complete this survey. I am of the understanding that all of them suffered sexual abuse at some point in their lives before unfortunately—for my three brothers—becoming perpetrators themselves. This started in an Amish settlement in \_\_\_\_\_ where the abuse and sexual violence percolated through the family. The community of \_\_\_\_\_ and its daughter settlement in \_\_\_\_\_ have to my knowledge an extremely disturbing pattern of sexual violence even from the fathers of the families.*

6. *I think it's very important to realize that sexual abuse goes on everywhere in the world and not just among the Amish. ... I also think it's important that people understand that not every Amish community bans people if they go to the church leaders to report predators. And many Amish people are incarcerated for their perversion. Many go through the court and the legal system. It is important to me to get the word out that that it is indeed a lie that all Amish communities and churches are*

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*being silent about this particular thing. I was abused as a teenager. And I got help I needed and all of my attackers got brought to justice.*

*7. In our culture it is always the woman's or girl's fault if sexual abuse happens. The women are not giving their husbands enough sex which causes them to lust elsewhere. And the girls were too pretty dressed or did something that aroused them. So the men were never to blame. It was the woman who sinned. Eve ate of the apple.*

*8. I was a young girl, around the age of 7 (my memory is a bit blurry yet of around that age), while playing a game of hide and seek. I told my mom what happened and she said I can never again go hide with that person who abused me. But I ended up being forced once more. And I let my abuser know I told my mom. It never happened from him again.*

*After I was a teenager and realized just what happened, I asked my mother if she or my father ever talked to the abuser's parents. The answer was, "No, your dad was too afraid of causing an uproar in the family." I have since forgiven him and have healed from it. Now, instead of hurting from the pain of what happened to me, my heart hurts for him and his family. Hoping and praying that he has repented and given his life to Christ.*

*9. So far since leaving the Amish almost 95% of all women and children whom I have met who have also left have suffered from of sexual abuse. And we have been out for almost 9 years.*

*10. I was sexually abused by an older cousin at age 4. My brother walked in on him and reported it to my parents, hoping for their intervention and help. (I learned in adulthood that he was being abused himself, and he also was hoping for help.) Instead, I was blamed for what had happened, and I was beaten with a leather part of a horse harnesses (called a tug). This was to keep the peace with my mom's extended family since the cousin pled innocence, and then my grandmother and aunt got involved and my parents didn't want to fall out of favor.*

*My entire life I was treated as a dirty sexual pervert. Later, I learned my son was being molested by his cousins and I confronted my mother and sister to try and stop this cycle. Then my parents admitted knowing I was innocent as a child, but they told me to keep the peace. I should do the same to my child as they had done with me. But I could never treat my children that way. We are now safely living hundreds of miles away, but few people in the community would believe what goes on with my family if I were to confront them, as my father has been a minister and successful businessman his entire life. They look shiny and happy outside, but certainly are rotten on the inside.*

*11. A counselor in \_\_\_\_\_ told me that CSA among the Amish is the same as the general population, every one out of three children is a victim. She said there's only one thing different with the Amish and that is that they have more sex with animals. In my lifetime as an Amish person, I have personally heard confessions made before*

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*the church of having sex with animals. In two different cases, in the church district I lived in, we were ready to have communion before we had ordination service. In both cases the men confessed to having sex with animals and were put in the ban for 2 weeks. Both of those men ended up being ordained to the ministry. In my case, both myself and my firstborn daughter were molested, and from what I gathered from my mother, she was too. In one year's time, one of my nieces, a cousin, and a sister-in-law confided in me that they were molested. I've had friends tell me the same thing.*

*12. I was from a family of \_\_\_\_, and I know that every one of our family— \_\_\_\_, boys and \_\_\_\_ girls—were all sexually abused. I left the community at age \_\_\_\_ and wasn't a member there until I went back for about \_\_\_\_ months when I was \_\_\_\_ years old. During those months, I heard one married man confess to bestiality numerous times and eventually he was ordained deacon, and the hope and sentiment was that his selection was from God because maybe his ordination would give him the strength to overcome. I know of several other abusers in the community. One of them is finally going to trial with the church leaders defending him till their last breath saying nothing happened. Though it was always common knowledge his father even paid hush money in one case.*

*13. First of all ... THANK YOU for caring enough about this dark evil to expose it. It was rampant in the old order Amish where I came from. The one that abused me also abused over 25, yes, 25 other little girls. All because it was not taken seriously enough to STOP IT. And I know of many, many other little girls who were abused in this same church, many of them multiple times. Some by the ministers themselves. It is utterly heartbreaking. Most of them don't have a voice, and I must say my voice is shaking in exposing this.*

*14. I was sexually assaulted/abused daily by two older brothers and my grandpa as a young Amish child from 4 years old until 20 years old.*

*15. My sister was sexually abused and became pregnant and had a daughter. She was kept longer in the ban than her abuser. They said she was more to blame than he was, because she allowed her abuser to do it.*

*16. An Amish Bishop had as high as 9 victims in my community over the course of 15 years and was not reported to the law.*

*17. My wife was raped by an Amish neighbor when she was 8 or 9. As you can imagine, this has caused a lot of emotional damage and trauma in our marriage. This was never reported to anyone, and she never told anyone until several years into our marriage. Thank God for His healing power. It has been a long journey, but God has been very faithful to us.*

*18. The stigma that follows victims who go public is far worse than the fate of the perpetrators. The victims get blamed, they get ostracized, they are asked what they did to entice men to behave like that. As if a child has any understanding of sex! Beyond that, they don't educate or talk about sex at all.*

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19. I currently know of two communities not far from us with a major pedophile problem. In one the pedophile has been arrested a little over a year ago; in the other the pedophile still roams free, although people have tried to have him arrested. The one who has been arrested has the support of the ministry, and the church members are forbidden to talk about it unless they talk to the bishop. The pedophile who still roams free has sprayed gas into windows to drug the children before going in and raping them, during the night.

When the person who molested me and some other girls was exposed, it was suggested by his mom (a minister's wife) that we probably didn't behave ourselves like we should have, and caused him to act like that. I know that's not true! This problem is way more prevalent than people know or want to know. Thank you for doing this!

20. The only time the cops got notified about it was when the predator turned himself in with the ministry covering him, telling the cops they have everything under control. So he was let off the hook. But he is still living on the same property as young girls are, and he is still grooming them.

21. I personally know of two bishops, both related to me, who raped their sons and daughters. A third bishop had 32 counts of raping his four daughters. All three bishops were defended by the church members; all three were convicted in court and put in prison. When I saw how corrupt the Amish leadership was, I began to realize they might not be the exclusive Bride of Christ according to their narrative.

22. My older brother has always been the favorite child because he is a boy. From the time I was 7 or 8 until I was 10 years old, he sexually abused me. I didn't personally report it to anyone until several years later, but my parents knew about it. My older sister caught him several times and had to pull him off me. She told my parents, but they did nothing. When I was 10, my dad saw it happening multiple times. He only scolded him a little and did nothing to stop it from happening again. The sexual abuse stopped happening when I was 10, and my dad says he stopped it, but that's not true. The only reason it ever stopped is because I learned how to fight.

23. I grew up in the \_\_\_\_\_ Amish community in \_\_\_\_\_ before moving to \_\_\_\_\_. Sexual abuse and physical abuse were rampant. From brothers and sisters having babies together, to fathers and daughters having kids ... it is just sickening. The victimized children were silenced and led to believe they were to blame, so they should forgive and never say another word. The weddings and playroom situation in which the children of opposite genders are forced to kiss in front of the parents is another oddity. [Note: This seems to occur primarily in certain sects of Amish.] The abuse to animals and sexual abuse is just disgusting. So many men confessed in church to having sex with dogs or other poor animals. I am ashamed to say I grew up in such a cult that participated in such horror. The abuse that is given to the mentally disabled and Down syndrome kids will just break your heart! I have listened time and time again to the English go on and on about the Amish being such good people and how they envy their Christian ways that I only wished they knew the truth and there was a way to stop all of the abuse!

## *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*

24. *When I spoke of my personal abuse to an adult I was not believed. ... The adult interrogated my abuser who denied it, and the abuser started the work of preserving his image and I was accused of lying. ... My abuser turned to the Amish community and led people to believe I was a difficult, troubled, and crazy individual and was making terrible accusations that were not true, so he looked like the victim and I looked like the offender and the one lying. This is why those who are abused struggle to come forward because those in positions of power doing the abusing overpower and undermine those coming forward with the truth.*

*Later, I was told by a deacon in the same church as the abuser that he confessed to being mean to me but never fully owned or took responsibility for the sexual abuse. The confession thing they have in the Amish churches is useless. It is very similar to the Catholic sacrament where they believe that God abolishes their sin through confession to the priest, giving the priest the power to forgive and abolish their sins. Instead of directly being accountable to God, others, and law enforcement if they commit a crime, they look to the bishop giving him the power to deal with and handle their sin.*

*We all know how it's handled—the bishop tells the whole congregation what the sin is and whether it merits the shunning process. After that everyone is told to practice shunning if warranted and then to forgive that person of their sin and to never speak of it again. That systemic process only perpetuates and allows abuse to continue. Do you think an abuser is automatically going to stop abusing when he has received absolution from the bishop for his sins?! Is it true repentance, penance, or a way to try and appease their own conscience, when they confess their sin to the bishop?! In my humble opinion this confession system is only one aspect of a very complex problem, but a big part of the problem nonetheless.*

*Without directly addressing the sin issue within oneself, the damage and harm it brought to themselves and others, and processing the deeper underlying issues that allowed the sin to grow in the first place, there is no room being made for the work of true repentance and a change of heart. Changed behavior is the result of a changed heart. To sweep things under the rug and not be allowed to speak of what occurred is not going to make the problems miraculously disappear, just because the bishop has given his absolution. Why the bishop is being given that kind of power in the first place is a big problem too!*

25. *When I reported my abuse, I was whipped because I was bad. I was 8 years old.*

26. *Reporting abuse to the authorities is considered worse than the abuse itself.*

27. *There was a neighboring old order church where I grew up that the one preacher sexually abused his daughters and the bishop actually reported him to the authorities and the abuser has been in prison ever since. So I thought I'd let you know that thankfully some bishops/churches don't accept this in any way!*

28. *I was sexually abused by a friend's brother when I was 13. My sister, when she was 12, was raped by an older brother. She told me, but we never told my parents, which I regret to this day. I had many friends who were sexually violated by*

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male family members. A grandfather who molested his granddaughters, who were my friends and cousins. He was also a bishop. It was all hush-hush. This was in \_\_\_\_\_. I heard that the grandfather repented before he passed away, at a very old age. I'm so grateful these atrocities are being exposed and dealt with.

29. I myself wasn't molested but it was almost unreal, as over time again and again, I found out of yet another of my friends who was molested/raped. This was in a New Order Amish church.

30. So many of my female cousins and aunts are victims ... my aunt had my grandpa's baby. I had my dad's baby.

31. It was always blamed on the girl. Even if she was only small. My abuse started at age 8 until I told my mom at 14.

32. I was part of the \_\_\_\_\_ Amish in \_\_\_\_\_. These communities are a large part of the problem today! Between the mental, physical and sexual abuse, I still struggle today with knowing my self-worth. So many kids are abused and these crimes are hidden or the abuser is never punished due to the cultish religion or ordnung that they hide behind for protection. So many times, the abuser never once gets any punishment as the Amish deal with it according to the ordnung, and these children suffer for the rest of their lives. They provoke the kids by using sick rules for dating [bed courtship] and if you don't follow them you are put in the ban. ... We were all taught as little kids that the cops are of the devil and part of a cult, that is why we can never involve them as they will do bad things. I believed that for so long and even long after I left. That is sad and now I finally understand the reasoning why they would do that—to keep everything hush-hush and continue to control our minds! I appreciate all that you are doing and happy to help in any way!

33. In Amish culture the girls are always to blame, it was a girl's fault if she got sexually abused. And the men go free. Or it is the wife's fault, as she probably isn't giving her husband enough sex. On another note, fathers have no idea how to father their sons and daughters and be spiritual leaders in the homes. They have no idea how to love in a clean fatherly way, they have no idea how to connect on a heart level.

34. I was sexually abused from the age of 5 to teenage years by 6 different offenders. I know of many, many others that were. Far more of my ex-Amish friends were abused than not. Very sad and upsetting.

35. In the community where I grew up, if there was anything like that happening it would have been confessed in such a way that you hardly knew what they were confessing to. But it did happen, and as a result, my young cousin became pregnant from a family member and they tried to cover up and say it was the parents' child (the baby). Bestiality was something that was confessed to many times by numerous different men and boys. ... Another thing that happened many times was sexual impurity among the dating couples. I did not know of very many couples where this didn't happen, sometimes resulting in them getting pregnant and having to quickly get married.

## *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*

36. *While still Amish I personally knew two cases of the father having molested his own daughters. The one ongoing case was reported and three of the five ministers defended the molester. Two defended the girls.*

*Later, after we left, it was revealed that the three had molested their own daughters. The bishop served his time in prison as a “martyr.” Those (the molested) that reported it to the authorities were put in the ban and shunned for reporting it and were considered the bad guys. Later I found out of several more old cases in that community that were never reported.*

37. *I have a distant relative who is serving a decades-long prison sentence for molesting his nieces. The father of the little girls that were molested (by their uncle) reported it to the authorities, which caused a big uproar among the Amish. The father was basically reprimanded for going to the authorities; he was told that the Amish preachers should have been the ones to deal with it, where it would have been swept under the rug, with nothing really done about it.*

38. *My abuser, who was also my sister’s abuser, later was an Amish school teacher, and he is now an Amish bishop and a counselor. Also in our community, there are multiple other known cases of abuse in the last 15 years. Two brothers, one also a bishop, are in prison for molesting their own daughters. Another bishop has been dealt with by the church [not reported to authorities] for molesting his children. Another bishop was dealt with [not reported to authorities] for molesting a young girl in his church. A minister was dealt with by the church [not reported to authorities] for molesting his granddaughter. And the list goes on. Certainly not all of them are in the ministry.*

39. *As an Amish teen in my rumspringa time,<sup>27</sup> I was saddened that 75% of my friends endured sexual abuse, and they often spoke on it while intoxicated. I’d say over half of those reported to a parent or someone close and they were told they were lying or that they need to keep silent about it. Their voices need to be heard!*

40.) *Please, something must be done, there are many more children who need help among the Amish I know, I was there, and I saw my sister and relatives and friends, who were sexually abused and suppressed.*

### **Final Comments**

Among these heartbreaking testimonies, I hope you noticed the touching words of those victims who have found healing through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are a victim of CSA, He is your hope as well! He can “restore your soul” (Psalm 23:3). The restoration begins with the new birth. I recommend that victims acquire a copy of the book *On the Threshold of Hope*:

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<sup>27</sup> Rumspringa literally means “to run around.” It is a period of adolescence in which boys and girls are given greater personal freedom and allowed to form romantic relationships, usually ending with the choice of baptism into the church or leaving the community. Rumspringa is a custom not practiced in all Plain communities.

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*Opening the Door to Healing for Survivors of Sexual Abuse.* It is a biblically based, Christ-centered book written for victims of CSA.

**If you are currently a victim of CSA,** call 888-621-1985, and tell the person who answers what is happening to you. The person who answers your phone call will be able to help you take steps to protect yourself and stop the perpetrator. They will be able to speak in Pennsylvania Dutch. (Please understand, however, that they will not help you, or anyone who calls them, to leave a Plain community.) If your church ministry leaders tell you that you have done wrong in seeking help by telling someone on the outside what has happened to you, don't listen to them for a second. They are protecting themselves, not you.

**If you are a perpetrator of CSA,** your only hope is the Lord Jesus Christ and the forgiveness and deliverance from slavery to sin that He offers through His death and resurrection. If you repent and genuinely believe in Him, you will be born again. If you are truly born again, God will guide you to seek out any and all whom you have abused and, in the presence of witnesses, beg for their forgiveness. If you committed your crimes as an adult who was legally accountable to the law, you will also turn yourself in to the civil authorities and confess, just as you would do if you were born again and had gotten away with murdering someone in the past. *Born-again people obey God.* By turning yourself in to the authorities, you are more likely to receive leniency, but you must prepare to suffer the justice you deserve.

**To all readers:** If you are truly born again, you must not remain silent about CSA perpetrators in your community, regardless of pressure from any ministry leader to keep quiet. Apart from physical restraint, CSA perpetrators generally continue their pattern of abuse. By remaining silent, you are assisting them in their abuse of innocent children and teenagers—as you surely know in your God-given conscience. And you are violating God's commandment to love your neighbor by allowing predators to continue to prey on their victims. To require CSA perpetrators only to make a confession in church followed by a few weeks in the bann, while requiring church members to forever remain silent about perpetrators' crimes, is a gross perversion of Jesus' teaching about church discipline and forgiveness.

**To Plain leaders:** We all have an obligation to report CSA perpetrators to civil authorities. This is even more true for ministry leaders, which is exactly why some Plain ministry leaders are in prison today for not reporting CSA perpetrators. Plain ministry leaders often emphasize the Bible's instructions to submit to church leadership while ignoring the same Bible's instructions to submit to civil authorities. If you are a Plain ministry leader, don't be a hypocrite who expects submission to yourself from church members while you fail to submit to civil authorities. Are you protecting children and teenagers, or are you protecting predators?

## *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*

If you are a reader who claims to be born again, and you are angry that we've published all of these testimonies "because we are trying to make all Plain people look bad" (a false judgment), I would encourage you instead to weep for what has been happening for decades in some Plain circles and send evangelists to preach the gospel, as your ancestors did, to the Plain communities that are, unlike you, unregenerate and in complete spiritual darkness regarding the power of the gospel.

Finally, please join me in praying for an end to the plague of CSA in Plain churches and everywhere else that it terrorizes innocent children, often emotionally scarring them for life, which then has a cascading effect upon many others who suffer as well.

## Chapter 23

### Why Be Liberal?

WBP? Chapter 10, pages 195-216

Every chapter of *Why Be Plain?* begins with a fictitious conversation between two young Plain men, cousins Dan and Steve, who have decided not to join their parents' Plain churches. Their conversations always include typical reasons used by Plain people who leave Plain churches, which Weaver and Zimmerman then address in the remainder of each chapter.

The final chapter of *Why Be Plain?* contains another fictitious conversation between Dan and Steve, but this time it is 50 years later. Now they are both elderly men who look back with regret at the decisions they made as young men not to be Plain. They both admit that the real reason they left their Plain lives was because they wanted cars, cell phones and electricity (pp. 200, 206). And the results have been disastrous. Weaver and Zimmerman weave a story about Dan and Steve's post-Plain lives in which everything that could possibly go wrong has gone wrong. From church splits, family strife, divorce, wayward children, to a tragic death and an adulterous remarriage, Dan and Steve have been through it all. If they had remained Plain, presumably none of those negative things would have happened.

Their story, of course, is entirely fictitious, and it only serves to affirm all the previous chapters. Weaver and Zimmerman continue to write about "guidelines," the "world's possessions," and Plain "nonconformity," reminding readers that only Plain churches are "Scriptural" and "Biblical." The whole chapter is designed, as is the entire book, to persuade Plain people to remain Plain. If they don't, they will end up like Dan and Steve.

## *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*

Of course, anyone can write a fictitious story, but real stories are more persuasive. I personally know many people who have left Plain churches to follow Jesus, and they are enjoying all the blessings of those who follow Jesus. Their marriages, families, careers and businesses are blessed. They are raising their children to follow Christ, but without hundreds of man-made rules and fence laws. Their adult children have followed their example and are raising their grandchildren in the “nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). They are letting their lights shine and are influencing others to become Christ’s followers. And that is the life I’ve been enjoying for decades. I wouldn’t trade it for anything except heaven!

Since Weaver and Zimmerman finish their book with a fictitious story, I’ve decided to write one too. I hope you enjoy it.

### **This Could Be Your Story**

Dan was surprised to hear the sound of an automobile pull up in front of his house that Saturday morning. “Who could it be?” he wondered to himself. He walked into the kitchen where his wife of 42 years, Fannie, was just getting the coffee pot brewing over her wood-burning stove. Dan pulled back the white curtain hanging at the kitchen window to look outside. Stepping out of a white SUV was a nicely dressed, gray-haired man who, after briefly looking over a few of the large trees in the front yard, walked towards the house.

Dan made it to the front door and opened it just as the stranger was about to knock, which caught the visitor by surprise. But when his eyes met Dan’s, he smiled and said, “Bishop Dan! So good to see you!” This time Dan was caught by surprise. “How do you know who I am?” he asked.

“Well,” the stranger replied, “I’ve only known you for 63 years! Maybe you don’t remember the times we went fishing at your grandfather’s pond, or when I helped you do your chores, or when we both had our eyes on a girl named Fannie?”

Dan was stunned. Could it be his closest childhood friend, Steve Byler? His eyes opened wider and his jaw dropped in shock. “Steve?” he asked. “Stevie Byler?”

“You got it!” Steve replied with a laugh. “I’ll bet you never thought you’d see me again. I was in the area for the first time in a long time, and thought I’d take a chance and see if you and Fannie still lived in the same old house. And here you are!”

“Yes, we’ve lived in this house now for a little over 40 years. Raised all seven children here.”

“Wow! Do you have time to visit for a little while?”

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“Sure! I can’t allow you inside of course,” Dan replied with a knowing look, “but we can visit out on the porch.”

“That would be great,” Steve replied.

“Take that rocking chair, and I’ll be right back after I tell Fannie to bring us both a cup of coffee.”

As Dan went inside, Steve took his seat and looked out over the property. Nothing had changed since the last time he’d been there decades ago, except that the oak trees were much taller and the barn siding was quite weathered. Steve overheard some tense conversation coming from the kitchen, but he couldn’t make out the words. After a few minutes, Dan came out with two cups of coffee.

“Do you still drink yours black?” Dan asked.

“I do,” Steve replied. “You and I had many early-morning cups of coffee riding together all over this county when we worked together on Jake’s carpentry crew. That was a long time ago.”

“It sure was,” Dan replied with a sigh. “So what have been up to since you ran away from us? I heard you moved to Kentucky.”

“Yes, we did relocate to Kentucky, and we’re still there. But just for the record, we didn’t run away.” Steve paused for a moment and stared at the porch floor as he thought about his next words. “You may recall that a fellow named Bishop Dan excommunicated us. After that, we didn’t feel very welcome around these parts, so we headed to Kentucky where Mary had some relatives who had also been excommunicated.”

Steve then looked over at Dan, whom he noticed was now himself looking at the porch floor. “And we started our lives over. Mary and I have never heard from anyone here again, including our parents and most of our siblings. But God has taken good care of us. We’ve raised five wonderful children who have given us eighteen grandchildren so far. We live on ten acres outside of Lexington.”

Both men sat in awkward silence for a minute, until Dan finally responded with a deep sigh. “Steve, that was a horrible time, and God knows how difficult it was for all of us. I never dreamed I would have to excommunicate my closest childhood friend. I don’t think I slept for weeks. But we had to do it. We did what we had to do. I kept hoping you and Mary would come back to the church and confess. When I heard that you had moved to Kentucky, I felt a terrible ache in my heart. To be honest, that ache has never left me. But there have been so many others who’ve left since then. Now it’s layers of aches in my heart. I often wish God hadn’t called me to be a bishop.” Dan

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paused, sighing again while still staring at the porch floor. "But we have to do what the Lord expects of us. We can't allow disharmony in the church." The two men again sat in silence.

Finally, Steve spoke up. "I'll admit, I was stubborn. But I just couldn't see the sense in not being permitted to use power tools on my carpentry jobs. We had to compete with the English crews, and we could only lower our wages so much. I told the boys on our crew to keep quiet about the power tools we were buying. When you found out and confronted me, I was sorry. But when I searched the Bible to find something that would lead to me to think power tools were worldly, I couldn't find anything. That's when I dug my heels in. I just wanted to make a living to support my family."

"Believe me, I remember every detail like it was yesterday," Dan replied. "I even tried to rally some support to change the ordnung, but none of the other bishops would budge."

Steve nodded his head to show his understanding. "Can I ask a question?"

"Of course."

"Nowadays, are carpenters in the community allowed to use power tools?"

"Yes. It's been that way for at least fifteen years."

Steve sighed. "I see. I guess I was just born too soon."

The two men again sat in silence, until Dan spun his rocking chair to face Steve and look directly at him. "I'm so sorry. I wish it had never happened."

"Me too. Mary and I left crushed. Our hearts were broken. But there's something I've wanted to tell you for a long time, and to be honest, that's one reason I came to see you today."

"What is it?"

"God redeemed what happened, and when I look back now, I thank God for it all. Our excommunication started a journey that I wouldn't trade the world for. In our deep disillusionment of losing all our family members and friends, Mary and I drew close to one another, and together, we drew close to God. We started reading our Bible together, and we discovered truths that changed our lives. The biggest truth was that God loved us so much that He sent His Son to die for us, and He promised if we would believe in Him, we would experience new life and eternal life." Steve paused to look at Dan to assess his interest.

"When we believed, we were born again. It radically altered our lives. We got involved in a wonderful church in Lexington where the Bible is faithfully preached and that is full of other born-again believers who love the Lord."

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We've raised our children to serve Him, and now they are raising our grandchildren to serve the Lord as well. We all live within 20 minutes of each other. Our lives are full of joy. And it all started when you excommunicated us. So, my old friend, although this is going to sound strange to you, thank you."

Dan desperately tried to process what he'd just heard. *Steve must be deceived. He's worldly. He's driving a car. He isn't wearing Plain clothing. He has a phone that he's placed on the porch railing.* Dan suddenly found himself blurting out, "But you broke your vows to the church!"

Steve put his hands together and brought them up to his chin. "That's not the worst thing I've done, and you, Bishop Dan, are certainly aware of that. In fact, if my memory serves me correctly, you were right with me many times when we did things we both knew were against the ordnung and the Bible. I've sinned many times. That is why I needed a Savior. And when I made Jesus my Lord, believing in Him, He not only forgave me for everything I've done, He also came to live in me by His Holy Spirit. He freed me from my slavery to sin. He empowered me to obey His commandments. And He taught me that man-made rules are only needed for people who don't love Him, because He said that if we love Him, we will keep His commandments.

"And this one is going to shock you, Dan, but one of the things God forgave me of was for making vows to any church or ordnung. You won't find anyone doing that in the Bible or any apostle advocating it. It's just a man-made tradition. When I made Jesus my Lord, I made a vow in my heart to follow Him alone. So I tore down the biggest idol in my life, the thing that controlled my life up until that point—the ordnung."

Feeling awkward, Dan looked away as he shifted his rocking chair back to its original position. He took a long drink from his half-empty coffee cup. "Well, I'm glad you've found something that makes you happy. I'm quite content with what I've got, and as bishop, my job is to keep harmony and unity in the church."

"But what about all those people who've left, and all those whom you've excommunicated over the past decades? All the families, like ours, that have been shattered? That doesn't sound like harmony. What about your own children? Are all seven still living nearby?"

"Actually, no," Dan hesitantly replied. "Only one is in the area about thirty minutes from here. She and her husband are in a different church district. We get to see them and their three children fairly often."

"What about the other six?"

"Well, they're scattered about. You know how restless we Amish are. Two are in Missouri, one is in Pennsylvania, and one is in Indiana."

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Steve did some quick mental math. That was four, not six. "Are they all still Old Order?"

Again, Dan paused before he answered. "No, the two in Missouri are Mennonite, and the one in Pennsylvania is part of what he calls a 'house church.' He goes on mission trips to Africa every year and thinks he's more spiritual than we are. All of them broke their vows to the church, and all of them drive cars. Out of love, we're shunning them in hopes they will be shamed and repent."

"What about the one in Indiana?"

"She and her husband attend a Baptist church. They wrote telling us that they attend two church services and one Bible study every week, but I'm afraid they are also in the world. We're praying for them."

"But what about the other two? You haven't mentioned where they live."

"We don't know where they live. We haven't seen or heard from either in years."

"What happened?"

"They are our two youngest sons. Both were rebellious as children. They always wanted the world's possessions. They both left home when they turned 18. We're praying for them too. And we've mailed all six of our wayward children copies of a book titled *Why Be Plain?* It explains the scriptural basis for all that we believe and why we do what we do."

Steve bit his lip as he wondered what he should say next. Then he found the inner courage to proceed. "Dan, you and Fannie are estranged from most of your children only because of Plain culture that is regulated by the ordnung. Most of my and Mary's family members are shunning us because of the ordnung. You can't invite me inside your house because of the ordnung. Your wife, Fannie, whom I haven't seen in years, seems to be remaining inside because of the ordnung. You are violating the ordnung by talking to me about spiritual matters, and I'll bet you've already been worrying about someone seeing us have this conversation. Yet you say the ordnung helps to keep unity and harmony in the church. Does it seem like that is what is happening?"

Dan decided it was time to change the subject. "Are you still doing carpentry work?"

"No," Steve replied. "After we moved to Kentucky, I got my GED and then started taking evening classes at the local community college while I worked daytime doing carpentry. I eventually became a pediatric nurse. Now I work part-time in a Lexington hospital and part-time in a rural clinic right in the heart of a large Amish community. That gives me an opportunity to serve our people and to let my light shine."

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"That's interesting," Dan replied. So, you have a lot of patients who are Amish children?"

"I certainly do. I know you are aware of the special issues among our people since they all descend from about 200 families. We see children with hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, snip 1, Troyer syndrome, Mast syndrome, hemochromatosis, Yoder's dystonia, propionic acidemia, oral facial clefting, thyroid dishormonogenesis, coenzyme Q10 deficiency, spastic ataxia, cystic fibrosis, cartilage hair hypoplasia, galactosemia, mitochondrial DNA depletion syndrome, primary microcephaly 6, and statin induced myopathy. You may have heard of some of those. Most of our people carry genes for two to six of those disorders. But they are mostly recessive genes rather than dominant ones, so you have to have two copies—one from the father and one from the mother—to affect the children. But they are occurring with increased frequency."

"Yes, I know we sometimes can't understand God's will, can we? We just have to accept it."

"Actually, you can also thank the ordnung for all those genetic disorders among our children. Because our people are only permitted to marry our people, the likelihood of genetic disorders increases substantially. And it's not God's will. If I thought it was, I wouldn't be trying to help those children and their amazing parents. But what motivated me to become a pediatric nurse was the love that God put in my heart once I was born again. I love to serve people, especially children. Two of our children are following in my footsteps into the field of medicine. One is considering working at a medical clinic in a very poor part of rural Africa."

Dan was again at a loss for words. Just then, a horse-drawn buggy drove by on the road connected to his driveway. Dan recognized the horse, and he instinctively dipped his head while reaching up to pull his hat down over his forehead, waiting for the sound of the horse's hoofs to fade.

"See what I mean?" Steve gently said. "Do you realize that you could be reconciled with all of your children, their spouses, and your grandchildren if you would simply do what the Bible teaches instead of what the ordnung teaches? It sounds like five of your children are serving the Lord—maybe not according to the ordnung, but according to the Bible."

Dan listened in silence. The thought of actually enjoying relationships with his children and grandchildren was almost overwhelming.

"And there is something else you should know. Your two youngest sons live in Lexington. When they left you, they tracked me and Mary down, and they lived with our family for several months until they got on their feet. They are both doing well. They are both married and have children. They both attend

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the same church as Mary and I do along with all our children and grandchildren. They both would love to have a relationship with their parents. They would love for their children to have a relationship with their grandparents. But they know that is not possible. They knew I would be visiting you today, and they both told me to tell you and Fannie that they love and miss you.”

With that, Dan broke. Leaning forward, he put his head in his hands and began crying. Soon he was sobbing uncontrollably, and he couldn't stop no matter how hard he tried. Steve just watched in silence. It went on for ten minutes.

Finally, Dan looked up through his tears at Steve. “When you go back to Lexington, please tell my sons that I love them. Tell them I'm sorry. Tell them I know I did what the Bible warns fathers not to do. I just read it this morning in Colossians 3:21: “Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they will not lose heart.” I expected too much of them. I'm so sorry. And I'm sorry for what we did to you and Mary.”

Steve did his best to comfort his childhood best friend. “I know that you've always tried to do what the Lord wanted you to do. But I'm afraid tradition trumped the truth. The good news is that God is the God of second chances. His mercy is so great. He can restore everything that you've lost. But you are going to have to put Him first in your life, before every man-made tradition. It's actually really simple. You just have to focus on actually loving your neighbor as yourself. Of course, others won't be happy about it. In the end, however, it doesn't cost to serve God; it pays. Think about that, my friend. Okay?”

Dan nodded his head as he wiped a few more tears from his cheeks.

“I've got something I want to give you before I go,” Steve said as he rose from his seat. He then walked over to his car and returned holding a book. “All you really need is the Bible, because all the truth is in there. That is all our forefathers had. But I want to give you this book, as it might be of help as you search for truth. It is titled *Why Be Plain? A Biblical Response*.”

“We've been warned about that book,” Dan said as he looked out towards the road.

“I suggest that you read it *inside* your house.” With that, Steve extended the book to Dan. They both knew that the ordnung did not permit Dan to receive anything from the hand of someone who was excommunicated, much less a book that might challenge Plain teaching.

A few seconds passed. Dan took a deep breath. Finally, he reached out and accepted the book from Steve. “Thank you,” Dan quietly said. “And thank you for stopping by today.”

## *Why Be Liberal?*

“My pleasure. I hope to see you again soon. You and Fannie are always welcome to visit us in Lexington. You’ve got five beautiful grandchildren there waiting to meet you.”

Steve returned to his car and drove down the driveway. When his car was out of sight, Dan just stood there, trying to process what had just happened. He then heard the front door open behind him and soon felt Fannie’s arms wrap around his waist from behind. When she pressed the side of her head against his back, he felt the dampness of tears through his shirt. “I listened to your entire conversation from inside. I think God just answered my prayers by sending your old friend Steve here today. You know we’ve been talking about these things for a long time. Let’s do something. Let’s turn away from our idolatry. Let’s follow Jesus. Let’s see our children again. Come inside. I’d like to read that book with you.”



## Afterword

If you've read all the way to this point, congratulations! That says something good about your heart. I hope above all things that if you were not born again before you began reading, you are now. If not, don't wait another second. All God requires is that we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (see John 3:1–16). Anyone who truly believes in Him submits to His lordship. That submission starts with repentance and continues with obedience in proportion to one's understanding of His will. Of course, we discover Jesus' will by reading the Bible, and primarily the New Testament. When we are born again, His Holy Spirit comes to live within us to lead and guide us into truth and holiness.

You may be wondering what to do now that you have a better biblical understanding regarding what you've been taught, perhaps all of your life. My suggestion is that you pray and ask God for wisdom. Also ask Him to guide you as to who might be most open to receiving a copy of this book. Once you know the truth, you can't keep quiet about it! I suggest that, when you do give this book to someone, you explain that love is what is motivating you. Our goal is not to win arguments, but to win hearts.

Please don't hesitate to send me news of what God is doing in your life. I would love to hear from you! I can be reached at P.O. Box 611, Punxsutawney, PA 15767.





