

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

Features

- 16 **Spiritual Survival in the Land of Plenty** *Materialism, greed and the gospel.*
- 19 **Breaking the Ten Commandments** *A fresh look at a monumental debate.*
- 21 **The Road of Grace** *The road we need can often be the hardest to find.*
- 22 **Leaving an Unhealthy Church** *How to survive “transition trauma.”*
- 27 **Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?** *Is there an answer?*
- 28 **Faith on the Ropes** *There’s a time for stepping out in faith—literally!*



Departments

- 3 **Letters**
- 5 **Christianity Without the Religion**
- 13 **He Asked Me to Remind You** *Steve Brown*
- 15 **Commentary** *Greg Albrecht*
- 26 **One Pilgrim's Progress** *J. Michael Feazell*
- 31 **Growing Places** *Susan Reedy*



6

Cover Story

Retrofitting

newspaper headlines into Scripture, many evangelical and fundamentalist Christians believe apocalyptic carnage will happen before Christ's Second Coming. It logically follows, they assume, that they must build and support the nation of Israel today, so that it can be destroyed tomorrow.

COVER IMAGE BY MARV WEGNER—PTM

About This Issue

I've read today's news and it's not good. It's all about high gas prices, war and more war, taxation, inflation, illegal immigration and nuclear proliferation. As if this wasn't enough reason for aggravation, some try to read today's news into Bible prophecy (or vice versa). But that just doesn't work—it only makes for “bad news religion.” Find out how and why in this issue's cover story by Greg Albrecht. He tells you what to watch out for so you can protect yourself and your loved ones against spiritual hucksters. And unfortunately, there are plenty of these around—people who are intent on doing violence to Scripture by twisting the grace and freedom of the gospel into some form of religious legalism.

For example, Glen Moyer asks why so many Christians seem to be fanatical devotees of the Ten Commandments—when Scripture is clear that this obsolete code was replaced long ago by Jesus' law of love. Yet another form of bondage that some want to inject into the Bible is materialism and greed masquerading as the Health/Wealth gospel. Barbara Curtis' “Spiritual Survival in the Land of Plenty” has plenty to say about this subject. But help is on the way. LeBron McBride provides first aid for those struggling to escape from religious bondage in his helpful article “Leaving an Unhealthy Church—How to Survive Transition Trauma.” In contrast to bad news—both secular and religious—the gospel of grace is 100 percent good news.

Eli Knapp's “Faith on the Ropes” offers an apt metaphor of living by faith and grace. The contrast is further illustrated in “The Road of Grace,” by Mark Maulding and Steve Brown's column, “I'm Big on the Church.” As you enjoy these and our other articles (including our regular columns), we hope you'll see that the good news of the gospel always triumphs over bad news, whether it comes to us from political and secular sources or from the world of religion.

—Monte Wolverton, Managing Editor

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Plain Truth Ministries proclaims authentic Christianity without the religion. We:

- Center our teaching on Jesus Christ and God's amazing grace
- Give hope to those burned out by religion
- Warn about and describe religious devices and detours, potholes and pitfalls that can lead us away from God
- Combat the deadly virus of legalism
- Base our ministry upon the essential, main and plain core teachings of historic Christianity

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Living in an Amish Paradise?

I am disappointed with the factual content [in the May/June article about the Amish] and in particular your broadcast interview with Joe Keim. You have done exactly what you have accused others of doing—painting all of the Amish under one brush. There are many different types of “plain people,” from those who have machinery to those who don’t; from the very legalistic to the cavalier.

The statement that Amish do not buy items at Wal-Mart is ridiculous. I have personally shopped with many different Amish families at Wal-Mart, buying all types of things. Amish do not necessarily connect the *Ordnung* (or their rules of living) with salvation—rather they see the *Ordnung* as the common basis for their culture, a means to control the world’s encroachments on their lives. Furthermore, the *Ordnung* is interpreted differently by the different groups. The Amish decision to remove themselves from society is a cultural choice, not a biblical one.

**Pastor
Missouri**

• *We will send your comment to Joe Keim for his answers to your questions. Our perspective for both the article and the interview which was posted on our website is that salvation is by grace alone, faith alone and Christ alone. Given that biblical perspective, and knowing the history of Anabaptism and of current Amish beliefs and lifestyle, we find that there are major inconsistencies between their rules/regulations/expectations and the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

—The Editors

From Joe Keim: I understand the perspective of the writer. From time to time I receive harsh emails from people concerning our ministry. I have had people curse me for meddling with what they considered to be the greatest people group alive. Here are my thoughts about the writer’s comments:

1) The writer may know a great deal about the Amish in his home area, but he was not born and raised in an Amish family.

2) What the writer says about the Amish not all being on the same level is true—there are probably 15-25 different denominations/orders that have exploded out of the original movement. For example, the Swartzentruber and Andy Yoder sects/orders are easily the most legalistic groups of all. From there you have the Old, Old Order, the King Order, the New Order and eventually you come to the Beechy Order, or sometimes called the Sunday School Amish. The differences between most of these orders are great enough that they will not fellowship or inter-marry with each other.

But, they ALL have one thing in common and that is they follow an ordinance that spells out the dos and don’ts of their order. The Beechy Amish are considered to be the most liberal group of all, and yet even they follow their own man-made rule book (ordinance letter). For instance, they are allowed to drive cars, but their rule book says that they are not allowed to buy a car newer than two years old, and within six months they have to paint the car black, including the bumpers.

I have two letters that have circulated in the Amish communities for years. One is a letter from God about what will happen to those who break the Sabbath and another purports to be from a woman who married and left the Amish, but later in life she is tormented by her conscience. (*Editor’s note: Readers may read these two letters posted on our website at www.ptm.org/amish. And if you have not already, you may wish to listen to our audio interview with Joe Keim.*)

Enforcing man-made rules in your home is acceptable, but when you start doing the same in a church it becomes religious legalism—legalism subverts and diminishes God’s grace.

**Joe Keim
Ohio**

I just listened to your interview with Joe Keim about the Amish, and then I read the [May/June] *PT* cover story. All my neighbors growing up in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, were Amish or Mennonite. In fact, the movie *Witness* was filmed at the farm next door. So this topic is particularly interesting to me.

**Donna
Texas**

Your cover story on the Amish was intriguing. I have never seen anyone with the guts to be critical of the Amish. I appreciate your insights; it was a revelation.

**Paul
Oregon**



Release the Oppressed

Thank you so much for the articles in the March/April *Plain Truth*. I am 87 years old, living in a nursing home, and I am still suffering over the religious legalism I was taught all my life.

I always felt something was wrong, but I couldn't seem to get the answers, and I thought I wasn't the good Christian I was supposed to be. I just couldn't force myself to be as perfect as I was taught I should be, and the more I tried to get better, the worse I seemed to be.

I badly needed the message your magazine brought to me. I've been miserable thinking how I've failed to do the things I must do to please God. I dwell on this so much that I fail to dwell on the fact that Jesus has done it all for me.

I know my days are not long for this earth, and my only desire is to love God and do whatever he would have me do. I don't want to continue wondering if I've done enough to please God and spend eternity with him. Thank you so much for the message I needed to set me free. I will share it with others.

**Irlena
Illinois**



Christianity Without the Religion

A friend recommended your website after we had a thoughtful conversation about the subject of "church" and how so many churches seem to have regressed. I walked out of a "brick-and-mortar" church well over a year ago, not being well received by the men who were my spiritual leaders. God is great—not man. We are simply sinners with a most loving Father (as a parent, I get that). Thanks again for your messages.

**Seena
Virginia**

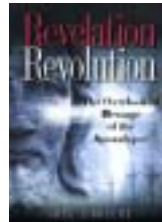
We appreciate your teaching about God's grace—it's helping us understand

the freedom we have in Jesus. We don't currently attend any church at this time. But we enjoy reading the materials from PTM and worshipping with you via *CWR* on the Internet. Keep up the good news of hope that you are giving, and helping us put our faith in Jesus and God's grace.

**Don
Pennsylvania**

Our small church often has no pastor available to conduct services, so we often rely on *Christianity Without the Religion* CDs for our worship. Your message is so close to where our church is, spiritually, and your messages often feel as if they are meant specifically for us. In a sense, your "church without walls" often finds a home in our church with walls.

Canada



Revelation Revolution

Thanks for your book, *Revelation Revolution*. You have helped me come to understand a lot of things. I used to be a believer in the Rapture, the 7-year Tribulation and the literal 1,000-year Millennium. I even wrote you a couple of emails on it, but I am not married to that belief anymore. I'm glad I'm not, because it is not grounded in Scripture. I now see that the Rapture teaching was just Scriptures pasted together to try and prove a point. I learned in college that this is a dangerous approach to understanding the Bible. We should let the context speak for itself instead of putting our own ideas into it.

In my opinion, your book was well done and I recommend it to anybody who is caught up in end-time prophecy. Who are we to predict the future? Only God knows. Christ is indeed going to return. How and when it is going to happen (as you said in your book) is non-essential. The important thing is that we are given salvation and we are going to spend eternity with God because of what he has done for us. Whatever God does when he returns, it will be good. Gray areas are hard for people, because we want to be told exactly what will happen. But when we do that, we take our focus off what really matters.

**John
Kentucky**

• See the back cover of this issue for information on how to order your copy of *Revelation Revolution*.

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