

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

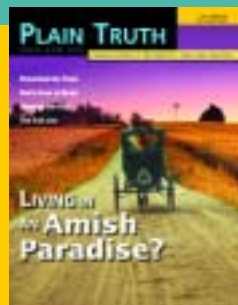
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Cover Story

The romantic myth of the Amish has been perpetuated in the media. But there is a dark side to the idealism that tourists in Amish country see as they shop for crafts and attend quilting bees. The Amish are locked inside a rigid legalistic religion, and the decision to leave it can be an extremely arduous one.

COVER IMAGE BY MISSION TO AMISH PEOPLE (MAP) MINISTRY AND MARV WEGNER—PTM

About This Issue

Regular readers know that *Plain Truth* (and its publisher, Plain Truth Ministries) absolutely believes in God's amazing grace—faith alone, grace alone and Christ alone. We know that the virulent virus of legalism wars against God's free grace.

Many who find our message especially attractive, and healing, are those who have lived in the brackish backwater swamps of legalism. It has been several years since Joe Keim (see photo), who leads Mission to Amish People (MAP), and I started to talk on the Internet, and then on the phone. Our growing relationship finally found me on a visit to Amish country in Ohio—a fascinating journey into one of the many strands of legalism—and an encouraging one meeting ex-Amish believers. Our cover story this issue, "Living in an Amish Paradise?" tells the rest of the story.

Legalism is an old enemy of the gospel—but there's a new one that partners with legalism and can deliver a lethal one-two punch. Legalism convinces us that we can never do enough and that we can never have enough time to do everything that needs to be done. Are you stressed out? Crunched for time? Can't seem to get everything done that "needs" to be done? Running around like the proverbial "chicken with its head cut off" (readers who have not seen this sight I saw as a young boy on the farm will not appreciate the powerful word picture that graphically illustrates the lives of many in our North American culture). The idea that we never have enough time, whether it be for secular or spiritual activities, is a cloud under which many live. Be sure and read Ray Albrektsen's "Crunched for Time" and Mike Peterson's "Why Are We So Stressed?"

Please remember, whether you are a long-time reader or someone who is new to our pages, and to our ministry, we appreciate hearing from you. Tell us what you think the old fashioned way—with paper, pen and postage stamp—or send us your comments via our website at www.ptm.org. In any case, don't forget to visit our website for the many resources we offer—not the least of which is our online church without walls—*Christianity Without the Religion*. Drop in anytime, 24/7, and worship with us!



— Greg Albrecht, Editor-in-chief

MISSION STATEMENT

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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Release the Oppressed

Thanks for the March/April lead article “Release the Oppressed.” I’m concerned that the church my wife and I attend is legalistic and the pastor is not being led by the Holy Spirit.

Week after week the messages seem to evolve into a weekly tongue-lashing telling us how to pray better, give more, study better, be more involved, be obedient to the leadership, etc. We are even challenged in our salvation if we do not buy into all of this completely.

I leave church every Sunday feeling angry and depressed. My wife and I are so upset that it is hurting us as a couple—we are both ready to leave, but I am dragging my feet. This is the church I got saved in, and the only one I have ever attended. I am torn between what my heart is telling me and so-called loyalty to the only church I have ever known.

Massachusetts

• *Church is not something we should have to spend the rest of the week getting over! It is hard to leave a church home, to decide when a situation has become spiritually dysfunctional and debilitating. But God does not want us to live with fear and anxiety—that’s why our Savior came. He came to bring rest and relief—to release the oppressed.*



You Can Trust the Bible

I’m really enjoying the [March/April] issue of *Plain Truth*, especially the article on Bible translation and the reliability of the Bible. The author correctly chastises the Adventists for even permitting “the Clear Word Bible,” as it was originally called, to be published and sold in bookstores.

As a Seventh-Day Adventist, but one whose grace model closely fits yours, I was appalled. It is noteworthy that the

word “Bible” was dropped from the title when it was republished, offering instead the title “The Clear Word: An Expanded Paraphrase to Build Strong Faith and Nurture Spiritual Growth.”

**Jeffrey
California**



Creation Care

Thank you for the lead articles on “Creation Care” in the January/February issue. As I’ve come to expect, your magazine is right down the middle of the road, not in the right or left ditch (they’re both too crowded already).

For years I’ve felt that Christians should be the front runners in caring for the creation. As your cover stated, it’s not about worshipping the creation (plenty do that). It’s about loving our “Land Lord” and his children.

To this end, my company has been working for the past ten years to restore fish habitat here in the Pacific Northwest. As a Christian, I find that my effort toward that goal fits perfectly with my theology.

Although most of my work is for pay, I’ve done enough voluntary work, public speaking, etc., to be the first person in Oregon to receive the Governor’s Take Pride Appreciation Award (sponsored by the US Department of Interior and State of Oregon) for stewardship of public lands.

**Mark
Oregon**

I was surprised and delighted to see a number of articles about the stewardship of our planet in the January/February issue. There is a long history of American hunters and anglers being the leaders in the conservation of natural resources in this country.

Many of the sportsmen of the past came from rich Christian traditions that saw conservation as a response to God’s command to care for his creation.

I have been a lifelong fly fisherman mostly, and I have a done a little upland game hunting in the past. I believe that Christian sportsmen do have an

opportunity to influence the culture toward stewardship through secular as well as Christian organizations.

The only balanced attitude, in my opinion, is God's view that asks us first to take care of each other and then take care of that which he has given to sustain us in this life.

**Jeffrey
New Hampshire**



Getting Better in Spite of Myself

I love *Plain Truth* magazine—when it arrives I can't put it down until I have read it from cover to cover—sometimes re-reading parts of it a second time. I am always amazed at the way your writers get the attention of the average person and how well they often do it with a sense of humor.

**Terrell
Florida**



Christianity Without the Religion

I just listened to Greg's first sermon on the new online church service, *Christianity Without the Religion* (CWR). The sermon was great, and what a great idea! The PTM website is truly amazing. I pray for you all and for the resources you need to keep going...and growing.

**Sally
Nebraska**

I am praying for the success of *Christianity Without the Religion* (CWR). Since I live in a remote area of Maine, and thus far have not found a spiritually healthy church in my local area, this will help me to feel more connected and sharpened (2 Timothy 2:15, Proverbs 27:17). I honestly believe once the Word gets out (pun intended) about CWR, many who have been disenchanted and discouraged from religion will be attracted to what CWR has to offer—

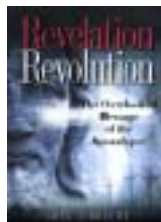
undelineated Christianity without the legalism of ideologies and moralism.

**John
Maine**

I love your messages on *Christianity Without the Religion*. After 20 years of attending church (ten years of a legalistic-based worship and ten years of a grace focus), I am at the point where I want to be certain Christianity is all about living a life which gives to the needs of others, avoids selfish indulgence and has genuine concern for the interests of others without ignoring my own needs as well. I don't want to be someone with no backbone who conforms to the world's attitudes and standards.

But I also have no desire to care for the needs of others just for the motive of bringing people into church. My church recently admonished the members to invite people in the neighborhood to come to church and then to a meal afterward. That's not my idea of evangelism. If in seeing the fruit of the Spirit in the way I live, someone is attracted to learn about why I live the way I do, then fine, I'll be glad to explain it. But Christian living isn't about just doing good for others so that we can get the unchurched into our church!

**Tony
Canada**



Revelation Revolution

I received your new book, *Revelation Revolution*, a couple of weeks ago and have read through it for the first time. I then passed it along to a friend. When I get it back I will read it again, along with a more in-depth study of all the Scripture references.

I must say that I appreciate your approach—Jesus as the Message and as the Messenger. I may not completely understand it, but I feel much better about spending time studying this part of Scripture after reading your book. I will be ordering more copies to give as gifts to friends. Thanks again and God bless you and all the staff at PTM.

**Duane
Nebraska**

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

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