

# Halting Between Two Opinions: To Be or Not to Be

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Halting between two opinions: To be or not to be. I'd like to look at the disease, the diagnosis, the antidote, and a few closing comments on direction.

**Disease is a dis-ease.** We have an identity problem among us as radical followers of Jesus. We have a crisis. I'm afraid we don't know who we are, where we have come from, and subsequently where we are going. There is in general (this may not apply to all groups or areas) an 80% retention rate amongst Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonites. How about the Hutterites, brother Dean? About the same. There is a 30% retention rate amongst Beachy Amish and New Order Amish.

Attrition means to wear down by constant rubbing and friction. We have the Amish to Beachy or to Holdeman or to Charity. We have the Old Order Mennonites to Wisler, and the Beachy to the BMA, and the Holdemans go straight into the world because they, sad to say, have no other option. I hear the old men crying. I see it in the *Calvary Messenger*. Why should the young men listen? Why? If we already have the Internet and we have smartphones, and we can have any type of music we want, why should we not then continue with those types of technology (thinking of the *Calvary Messenger* plea)?

God's people were to have a purpose and they were to have a compelling argument for their sons and daughters. A compelling argument for their sons and daughters. Compelling! And as children we are ask our parents questions, and to grapple. And it is the parents' duty to bring them to the crossroads where they have to. And if we're not bringing them to a crossroad, maybe we're not stretching them, and teaching them as we should. It is not enough for a brotherhood to raise your children. You as fathers and mothers need to prove from history that you have a leg to stand on.

Wisdom is crying in the streets. I remember my father would get his *Martyr's Mirror* and his stack of family history books, and we would say, "Father, why? Why do we have to be different? Why do we have to be separate? Why? Tell us why? This isn't necessary. Our friends aren't doing it. This is really hard." And, sad to say, we'd do whatever we could to blend in with society, my brother and I.

## **The diagnosis.**

We need to be honest that we have a need, that we are ill. Jesus can't help us unless we are ill. We can't have help in our brotherhoods unless we have a problem. And to say that we have a problem, that there is a great rate of attrition, we must be honest.

I've presently seen, in my lifetime, in 48 years, I've seen three waves go through the Beachy church, in Sarasota, and across the country. Most of those I went to Bible school with are not in the Beachy church. I'm not saying they're not saved, I'm just saying there's a great movement. And the movement is to cast off restraint, to become less recognizable, less different from the world, more like the world. And folks, when you start adopting the world and everything that goes with it, you get the world's ills!

The diagnosis. We have a lack of direction and understanding of the times. Folks, we are in a post-modern and post-Christian era. Some things we think we have held dear and they will go on forever, but we are sadly deceived. We had a lack of community among us. We are being affected by the world; we're going out in all directions.

We are lean on *Gelassenheit*. We have a lack of *Gelassenheit*, and we're going to hear more this afternoon from Brother Chester on what that means. The world and society, and subsequently its ills, are rubbing off on us.

### **The antidote.**

Why should we keep taking chemo treatments, when statistics tell us that only 3% will live more than five years? Why do we allow the world to press us into its mould? Why do we keep doing things that don't work? Isn't that insanity? Shouldn't somebody stand up? You saw what it says on the program, you know, if they were stealing our Powerstroke pickups and John Deere tractors at the same rate of attrition that our children are disappearing, wouldn't we do something about it? Wouldn't our possessions matter to us that we'd do something? Why are we silent? Why are we not calling a group of men together and saying, "Brothers, we have a problem here? We're not sure what it is, but we need help. We are sick."

Alas, our greatest assets, I'm telling you. Why should we deny ourselves, why don't we just go there now ourselves, if our children are going to wind up there, why don't we go there ourselves? Why do we put ourselves through all kinds of trials and tribulations, when our posterity will be out there? Why wouldn't I just go join them now? But if it is something worthwhile to you, then fight for it. We need to be humble, and carefully reconsider, to return, to put away. Every generation must humbly inspect the previous generation. I say humbly, brothers.

Please hear me. And ask the question, in light of history, and interpretation of Scripture – we're not just islands in ourselves, John Dunn, we're not just here in a vacuum, but we are responsible to how the Scriptures have been interpreted for hundreds of years. Have we let down the guard? If we have let down the guard, can we be careful? We need to be careful with change. We think to better ourselves. So we go to the Beachy church. Now we're more spiritual. But our grandchildren are Protestants. What have we gained? Really, what have we gained?

The happy clappy versus the chosen frozen. We asked John to preach about that. Is there another option? I will throw my lot with the chosen frozen. If there's any such thing as the chosen frozen, that's where I want to be identified. You can always breathe a little life into culture, but you cannot breathe culture into life. You know what kind of life I'm talking about. Look like the world, act like the world, do what the world does, and yet all the while praising the Lord and shouting hallelujah. That's the kind of life I'm talking about. You can't breathe culture into that life. But if you have culture you can always breathe a little life into the culture. So I'm going to be identified with the chosen frozen, if you please. And you might not like that, but those are my people. And you work that out. Any action built upon reaction will not gain traction.

### **Closing comments on direction:**

I think we are through with the revival era, we are through with Sunday school, we are through with protracted meetings, we are through with these Protestant inventions. They haven't worked for us, they aren't producing the fruits that we want. Our children are going straight out there into their camps and into their schools. Why? Because we're aping them, we're watching them, we're doing what they do. I think, if you have Sunday school, hey, I guess that's okay, but I don't think you should put the focus on that. If you want to have a Bible study, fine.

We need to hold forth a holistic gospel that deals with more of man's ills, then just the salvific-based gospel, as we heard today. The early Anabaptists did not talk about salvation like that, they talked about a walk of life. As Robert Friedman said, what did Zaccheus do, when Jesus said, "Today is salvation come to this house?"

We need to establish kingdom communities. Start somewhere; do something to foster community. I don't just want to curse the darkness, I want to light a candle here today, so I'm talking about the antidote. What can we do, right here in this community, to foster brotherhood, to foster more of the kingdom on earth that is going to continue into the next world? Maybe we can garden together. Maybe we can butcher together. Maybe we can have more work bees, more brothers meetings. Maybe we need to foster local economy and start selling raw milk to each other and defy the state laws. Maybe we need to do some things to foster local brotherhood, and turn back to some things that have been stolen. The automobile has stolen so much, the combustion engine. I don't know where I'm going to wind up. I'm not sure if I'm going to be with Brother Wurtz, from Elmendorf. I don't know what it looks like for me, but I want my children to be radical followers of Jesus, whatever that means, whatever name that is. It's not so important a name. Don't get too nervous, names are okay. We need to live closer together. We need to share more.

And lastly, direction is everything. There are many people here today who are trying to swim upstream. I see you here, you have a heart for God, you've come from the world, you're looking to go to be more radical to follow Jesus and you're looking at the Scriptures and saying, "What does Jesus say, we want to do it", and there are many of our own people that are going the opposite way. We see it all the time. I talked to a brother who was at the Charity Bible School back in 1996 or so, and he said that to find two people today that can visit together that were there that day is very rare. Most of them are not here anymore.

Anything worth doing cannot be achieved in a lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope, as Reinhold Niebuhr said. So, I'm not going to see everything accomplished in my generation. I want to plant some maple trees for a sugar bush. I want to plant some black walnut trees that maybe my grandsons will harvest. Yes, figuratively, and yes, literally. And I may not see this, but if we can start the direction of returning to what it means, that we could turn around this rate of attrition, and that we could have more of the answers for this world's ills. Read my little hand out there, and let it jog your mind. God bless you.