

“No Greater Burden”

What does Acts 15:28 look like in 2014?

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This is a seminar I've looked forward to attending for quite some time. I did not anticipate having this role at the seminar but I suppose this is what happened due to the cancellation of another speaker a couple months ago.

There are several reasons I looked forward to attending this seminar:

1. My parents planted in my heart the desire to see new last names being added to the local congregation. We often invited neighbors to our house for a meal and invited neighbors to attend church or hymn sings with us.
2. It seems that when a church is mostly one particular ethnic group, it becomes ingrown and destroys itself from the inside out. I'm interested in learning ways of keeping this from happening.
3. The New Testament model shows us that the church was constantly adding people from all walks of life to his number. I believe this model should characterize the church today.
4. Folks from non-Anabaptist background can be the best recruiters for the Kingdom of God if they are happy to be a part of the church. They will bring their relatives and friends.
5. I've noticed that very few unbelievers join an Anabaptist church. Most folks from non-Anabaptist background are already believers. From my perspective, this indicates a problem. Those who stay with us tend to be the ones who are resolute and those who like old-fashioned things.
6. Many people who join Anabaptist churches are not able to make the cultural and religious adjustments that are necessary and so they end up leaving. I would like to see this trend reversed. Instead of the greater part leaving the plain people, I would like to see the majority of non-Anabaptist seekers be able to find a home among us.
7. One of my jobs with CAM/BBE is finding churches for people all across North America. Often there is not an Anabaptist church to recommend. Sometimes there is an Anabaptist church in the area but I know that they will not have a good experience if they attend there.
8. I used to think if we tweaked a few things – became more friendly and evangelistic – people would start coming in by the droves. I'm no longer under that allusion. We need to overhaul our concepts of ourselves.

“No Greater Burden”

What does Acts 15:28 look like in 2014?

As I’ve thought about this topic and discussed this topic with others the last few weeks, I’ve found this to be one of the hardest assignments I’ve ever been given. Typically I’m an apologist for conservative, orthodox, pilgrim Christianity.

As I’ve read and reread the chapters surrounding Acts 15, I can better understand why someone has said that conservative Anabaptists are more comfortable living and teaching from stories in the Old Testament, as compared to living and teaching from stories in the book of Acts. This has brought certain heaviness to my spirit.

But by God’s grace we will attempt to look at what the New Testament church concluded and see if we can make some applications for today.

So, let’s see if we can put our minds into an era and culture about 2000 years ago and feel a little bit of what the early church must have felt.

The early church had Jewish origins. God decided to begin the church with people who had the oracles of God in their history.

When the disciples of Christ were scattered after the persecution of Stephen they spread out to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch in Syria preaching only to the Jews. So for the first number of years, the church consists mainly of Jews.

Yet this is a time of transition – a time of change – a time of social upheaval.

We have various miracles surrounded its beginning including the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Timid men who bowed to religious and political leaders and were meeting behind locked doors for fear of their lives became bold for Christ. They told the religious and political authorities that they could not but preach the things that they had seen and heard. “If you have a problem with that, you’ll need to do what you need to do, but we need to keep proclaiming the gospel.”

As I view the Anabaptist church today, it seems we tend to be the fearful rather than the bold.

Part of this transitional period for early Jewish Christians is trying to decide how to be both Jewish and Christian.

So we have Christian Jews attending the Jewish meetings on Saturday and also meet early Sunday morning as a Christian church. Those who didn’t need to go to work tended to hang around and fellowship throughout the day on Sunday.

Many of the Jews continued to keep the law of Moses the best they could, while also following the laws of the New Kingdom ushered in by Jesus.

They continued to avoid Gentiles to keep from being “defiled” by them.

Then Peter had a vision. In this vision, Peter was taught that he should not call unclean, those things that God called clean. Directly following this he receives Gentile messengers from Cornelius and the Spirit of God tells Peter to get up and go with them.

Acts 10:24-35

Huge cultural changes are happening. The Spirit is asking Peter to break down his internal inhibitions and do things he has never done before in his life. This is difficult for Peter as we see later in the book of Galatians when Paul rebukes Peter to the face for being sectarian.

Cultural revolutions are not easy for any group of people. Particularly for cultures that have long histories and have kept themselves somewhat isolated from the changes that are happening around them.

Acts 11:1-10

Before long the Apostle Paul and Barnabas are taking the Gospel to Gentile lands and many are receiving the Gospel. They do not take their culture with them when they go preaching the Gospel. Paul and Barnabas do not require the Gentiles to keep the law of Moses.

Then Paul and Barnabas return to their base in Antioch. While they are there, some Jewish fundamentalists from Judea come to Antioch and tell the Gentiles that they need to be circumcised. So This is several years after Peter’s instructions to them in Acts 11 so either Peter quit preaching what he used to preach or else these folks from Judea are not hearing what Peter has to say.

So the church in Antioch decided to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to discuss this...

Acts 14:26 - 16:5

Highlight verses 10, 19, 28

Now there is not general agreement on why these four decrees in verse 20 given. Are these four decrees for all time and for all people? Certainly abstaining from fornication and other types of immorality is for all time and for all people. What about the other three? Are they for all times and all people, or were these huge issues that would have especially irritated the Jews and kept them from being able to eat or fellowship with the Gentiles?

In my study I was not able to reach an authoritative conclusion on this. I tend to think that these three are general principles for all people and all time. I’m not sure I would make them a test of membership though like I would sexual immorality. Concerning things strangled, I think I would treat this like David treated the show bread. I think

I might eat a strangled animal before I would starve. Perhaps you would not do this and if so, perhaps we can discuss it this afternoon.

So what does it mean to “lay no greater burden” in 2014?

Context of this passage:

Mosaic Law – In some senses we do not have an equivalent.

We do not have a God given law that has been recently fulfilled. (Some denominations like the LDS Mormons believe that God recently ushered in a new era, but those of us who hold to a historic Christianity do not have any time for this kind of thinking. They believe that polygamy was reinstated at the time of Joseph Smith)

In other senses we do have an equivalent.

There are things that we’ve been taught are important and to quit requiring them for those who are coming to the Lord, could cause problems in the congregation.

For people like the Apostle Paul, keeping the Jewish customs did not seem necessary. Then we have folks like the apostles in Jerusalem who thought keeping the law was good or necessary for Jewish Christians but not necessary for the Gentiles. And then we have the Judaizers who thought that everyone needed to keep the law if they wanted to be saved.

So we don’t have any exact comparison for today. The Jews were commanded of God to keep certain practices such as circumcision. Then in the New Testament, God releases them from this and says they don’t need to do this anymore.

But we are not in a different testament, so we don’t believe we can release people from observing communion, release women from covering their heads, release people from being baptized with water, etc. like many churches today believe we can.

However, I do think that there may be practices today that have become too weighty in our minds that we should consider making less weighty. I think we should consider what burdens we may place on others that should not be placed on others.

So we will start with the easy ones and work toward the harder ones. My goal is not to stand up here and declare exactly what is most weighty and what is not as weighty, but rather my goal is to stir up your minds to consider what the Spirit of God may be saying to us today about burdening others and putting a yoke on their necks.

Let’s start with some easy burdens that we should not be putting on those who are coming to the Lord

Cultural burdens - Is that a burden we should put on others?

I think most of us would agree that burdens that are strictly cultural should not be made a test of membership.

- Doing laundry early Monday morning-
- Gardening-
- Canning-
- Sewing-
- Speaking Pennsylvania Dutch
- Needing to change into nice clothes before going away
- Needing to prepare a delicious meal if you have company to your house (we may feel the need to apologize if we only serve sandwiches and soup)
- Weekly cleaning - This is getting harder, correct?
- Bathing several times a week – This is getting harder yet. (One man talks about his mother getting an automatic washer. With an automatic washer, they started taking baths every day. His mother ended up spending more time doing laundry than what she did with a wringer washer when she washed once a week. Have you ever considered how much time we spend just maintaining clean bodies and clean houses and clean yards? If we put this on others, it could be an unnecessary burden.
- Mowing the lawn every week or two. (Our family once visited with the President of a Bible College and his family. They invited us to their back yard for hamburgers and chips. The grass was about 6 inches tall at places. Their house was across the road from the college. We soon learned that this family puts people ahead of trimmed lawns. There is only so much time in this life. We can't do everything. This family chose hospitality ahead of a nicely mowed lawn. Is it any surprise that they have lots of friends and opportunities to minister to many people?
- Men driving the vehicle –
- Women washing the dishes after a meal -

Now I don't know of any church that requires these things of its members. So why would this be a burden on anyone? It becomes a burden by association. If nearly everyone in the church is doing something a certain way, it puts a burden on anyone who doesn't do it that way.

Now how do we take this pressure off of others? We take the pressure off by lowering our own standard and changing our own practices. People will feel the pressure if we all have the same standard.

Here is an example of changing practices. A family once had a neighbor lady stop by their house and inquire about going along to church. The neighbor lady was wearing an apron. The mother of the family at one point whispered

to the girls that they should all wear aprons to church as well. The girls grimaced but did as their mother instructed. I think God is blessed when we do these kinds of things.

Another example: A young man came to live with an older couple. He had two pairs of jeans. This young man was eagerly looking forward to attending church for the first time and did not wear his one pair of jeans all week because he was keeping them clean for Sunday. On Sunday morning, the older man had his Sunday clothes on and was sitting in the living room when the young man came down the stairs wearing his clean pair of jeans.

The older man asked if the young man was planning to get ready for church and the young man explained that he was ready. He explained that he had not worn his second pair of jeans all week because he was saving them to wear to church on Sunday. The older man suddenly realized what was going on and after giving the young man a smile of approval, he announced to his wife, "Well honey, I guess I should be heading upstairs to get ready for church." Before long he too came down the stairs wearing a clean pair of jeans.

You may have heard this one before. A young man came into a church one Sunday and could not find a place to sit. The young man ended up sitting down in the aisle at the front of the church. A deacon with a cane began making his way up the center aisle. With great effort he sat down on the floor beside the young man.

If a lady is sitting on a bench by herself and is crying. Get up and go sit beside her.

If she is frantically trying to manage her young children who are not used to sitting still in church, you could go get a story book, sit beside her children and look at the book with them.

I believe these are ways we can lighten the burdens of those who are coming to the Lord.

There is plenty of time down the road when we can teach people about cleanliness and proper conduct in the church assembly, and so forth. We need to do everything we can to keep them from being discouraged from being with God's people.

Many things don't need to be addressed the first week, the first month, or even the first year. The first things to concentrate on are the weightier matters of the Kingdom of God.

Here are the weightier matters of the law. (slide)

- **Justice**
- **Mercy**
- **Faith**
- **Love of God**

As a person comes in among us to and try to be a part of us and hear us talk, do they sense and feel that justice, mercy, faith, and love of God are what we care about the most. Or would they say that we care most about gardening, clothing, genealogy, family gatherings, and our social culture.

Now I'd like to tell you an imaginative story to help us understand what it is like to become part of an Anabaptist group that is mostly from one particular ethnic or religious background.

Let's say that we were born near Harrisburg, PA and we were not familiar with Christians who practice separation from the world and non-participation in civil government. One day four Christian families from Chinatown in NYC moved to Harrisburg to start a church. They all know each other somewhat and they know each others' friends. One day you meet one of them at Walmart and you get to talking and you are really impressed with their commitment to the God and the scriptures. To make a long story short you either become a Christian or if you are already a Christian, you decide to attend their church. These are Christians who are serious about following Jesus and the Bible and you can tell that they have something you want.

You begin attending their meetings.

The sermon is in English but the illustrations are from Chinese culture. The songbooks are in English but the tunes are Chinese tunes.

Even though the service is in English, they switch to talking Chinese with each other after the service. You can't understand a word of what they are saying. When they talk to you, they are polite enough to talk English, but when they talk to each other, they talk Chinese. Occasionally someone will infer in half serious way that you might want to learn the Chinese language at some point.

They invite you to stay for a potluck (something they call a fellowship dinner even though it is served at noon). When you get in line to get your food, you notice that everyone who is already eating is using chopsticks. Even the children can deftly eat with chop sticks. (slide)

You try using chop sticks but it takes you forever to eat your food, so the next Sunday you bring a spoon and fork along with you. Your new Chinese friends make a few light jokes about your American way of eating but they assure you that it is fine for you to bring a fork and spoon along if you wish.

After a few months you get tired of being different so you start experimenting with chop sticks at home. Once you've mastered it, you start using chopsticks at the fellowship dinners. It seems right that you would adjust to their way of doing things rather make all of them adjust to your way of doing things.

You have a problem though. Whenever you invite your friends and relatives to a fellowship dinner, you always need to make sure you bring spoons and forks along for them. You realize that if any of them ever join the church they are probably going to end up using chopsticks as well. Which means that any other Americans who try to join the church will feel even more pressure to use chop sticks because if a few Americans could switch from spoon and forks to chopsticks, certainly any other Americans can learn to do so as well.

Are you making any parallels with your ethnic culture?

(BTW, Have you ever thought about that we rarely have Orientals and African seekers hunting for a conservative Anabaptist church? It is typically people from Western culture who are in search of an earlier Western culture.)

2nd category – Church ethos – These are much harder issues to work through. (Ethos are guiding beliefs or ideals that characterize a community or an ideology)

Separation from the World:

- Refraining from using electricity from off the grid
- Driving horse and carriage
- Refraining from using abbreviated names such as Joe, Bob, etc. Using only full names such as Joseph, Robert
- Avoiding other “casual” practices

Religious Identity

- Driving black or dark vehicles
- Distinctive clothing: suspenders, plain suits, cape dresses, hats, bonnets, shawls, specific head-covering type.
- Growing a beard without a mustache / Not growing a beard at all
- Particular designs of meeting houses

Safeguards:

- Refraining from the use of Radio or TV or Internet
- Pursuing agrarian vocations
- Using a Bible with archaic English
- Sending children to church school rather than homeschool

Disciplines:

- Sitting still for two or three hours (even if unused to it)
- Keeping children well-ordered during and after church

- Kneeling for prayer
- Tithing
- Being on time for events

Historic Judeo or Christian Practices:

- Male suitors asking women for their friendship rather than women asking the men
- Segregated seating in the gathered assembly
- A cappella singing in the gathered assembly
- Religious Feasts / Special Days
- Men and women not wearing the same attire
- Sunday Sabbatarianism

Miscellaneous expectations:

- Made to feel guilty or inferior if you don't...
 - Stick with a certain kind of church the rest of your life
 - Visit with your own gender after church
 - Wear dark dresses (or light) for communion and baptism
 - Have a large family
 - View wedding rings as jewelry
 - Homeschool your children

Most Plain churches have a list of Church Ethos that look similar to this.

Then to make it more complicated, some expectations have varied expectations in the congregation.

Complications: Basically all conservative Christian groups have four levels of expectation

1. Expectations for those in leadership
2. Expectations that are “strongly encouraged”
3. Expectations for the rank and file
(oral and/or written standards)
4. Expectations for inclusion in the group
(test of membership / expulsion / excommunication)

Once we do things for a long time and continue them for several generations, they feel very comfortable to us but feel very uncomfortable to others. They can seem to us like very reasonable things to expect of others. If newcomers don't seem to be able to handle it, we may assume that this is their problem.

Now I do not know of any New Testament teaching that would forbid a group of believers from agreeing to adopt certain practices not specifically mentioned in the Bible. Anybody who wants to voluntarily commit himself or herself to certain spiritual disciplines for the furtherance of God's kingdom is welcome to do that from what I understand.

However, if these disciplines are tied to us accepting a person as a full member of the body of Christ, or if they cause us to distance ourselves from certain people who don't adopt these practices, then we may be guilty of being sectarian or guilty of offending a brother or sister for whom Christ died.

If we turn our spiritual disciplines into ethical matters that “Gentiles” must agree to if they want to commune with us or be regarded as a full brother or sister in the Lord, then this *can be* terribly offensive and even unscriptural.

Back to our Chinese story.

Now let's say that these Chinese Christians wear the traditional modest Chinese garb and so for awhile you dress American and they are fine with that. But when you ask what you need to do before you can commune with them or be a member of the church, they sit down with you and describe the kind of dress they would like you to wear. Their garb might look something like this. They tell you that it is good to have a unified expression. They explain that pants for men is a modern invention that their forefathers decided not to adopt.

Well, you've come to love these people and you've come to appreciate the things they stand for and so you adopt their way of eating food, the kinds of food they like to eat, and their way of dressing. You are starting to fit in. You believe the Lord is leading you to join this church and so you agree to their cultural expectations because you like their doctrine and the way they raise their children.

You have a problem though.

Your parents don't like your decision. They don't like their son wearing a robe. Your friends are certain you've gone off the deep end. It is hard to get your friends to attend church with you. At family gatherings you are now the outcast. So you stop spending time with your relatives and friends and spend all of your time with these Chinese Christians.

But in spite of how hard you try to fit in, it seems like there is always something that keeps you from fitting in. You find it hard to penetrate the Chinese culture. As more Chinese move into Harrisburg to be part of the church, you feel more and more marginalized.

Now most of the time they are not rude. Yet when holidays come around, they travel to see their relatives in NYC and they get together as families. You are supposed to go see your relatives on Christmas in your Chinese garb.

You start getting the feeling that you could leave, and it wouldn't be that big a deal to them. They might assure you that they need people like you in the church, but when you start addressing the things that seem like inconsistencies, they sort of push it off and say something like, we all need to learn to forgive and submit to the group.

You discover that these folks do not believe in using government insurance but they do expect you to contribute to the medical plan that they have as a church. The dues are not set according to people's income but there is a set amount that is the same for each family no matter what their income is. You work at the local dry cleaners and your weekly paycheck just barely covers the expenses. You find it difficult to meet the payments.

After a couple generations, this Chinese American church in Harrisburg decides that they are going to make eating with chop sticks a church standard. Their reasoning is that spoons and forks were a modern invention used by westerners and that since they are trying to take a stand against Western influence and against following the fads and fashions of the world, for the sake of unity; they have decided that everyone should eat with chop sticks. They may even assure you that it is not necessary for salvation, but if you want to join their group, this is what they expect of members.

And now we will look at a third category of practices – New Testament commands based on a cultural practice

Foot washing

Hospitality

Head-covering

Holy Kiss

Anointing with oil

These are all things Anabaptists believe should be practiced today and I think this is good. But have we identified and taught all the New Testament commands that are based on cultural practices?

Back to the imaginary Chinese church that you are a part of...

The Chinese American church in Harrisburg has some practices that are not practiced by many Christian denominations. They have practices like shaking the dust off their feet when someone does not accept the Gospel. When they pray they “lift holy hands”. Before fasting they wash their hands and anoint their heads as Jesus commanded. Every day they pray the Lord’s Prayer. Occasionally one of the shepherds in the church will perform a ceremony in which he pronounces a person’s sins to be forgiven. They take Jesus seriously when he says that his followers should not make a dinner and invite friends and relatives, but rather those who cannot return the favor.

When you ask them about these practices, you learn that these practices were taught in the New Testament and that the early church practiced them as well.

The Chinese Christians refer to these practices as “steps of obedience” or “Christian ordinances”. They believe these are practices that Christians should be doing today. And if you want to be a member of their church, you are expected to accept and adopt these practices.

However, as you study the Bible, you learn that there are other New Testament teachings and practices that they do not practice such as anointing with oil, foot washing, and the Holy Kiss. You think that if shaking the dust off one’s feet, and lifting holy hands, and forgiving peoples sins are scriptural ordinances, then you believe that some of these other commands in the Bible should be ordinances as well. You do your historical research for why these practices should be included, but when you recommend these practices to the church or attempt to practice them yourself, you are told that this church does not feel that these practices are for today, and that you must simply submit to their churches’ conclusion on the matter.

Now I don’t know where your minds are going at this point, but if this were actually a true story, I don’t know that I could conscientiously try to persuade you to stay at this church. I would encourage you to submit yourself to those over you in the Lord, and to do whatever they command you, but I would not encourage you to do after their works.

If you felt the Lord was leading you to leave this congregation and join a church on the other side of town also started by Chinese, but one that did not require robes for men and chopsticks for eating, I’m not sure I would encourage you to leave, but neither would I stand in the way of this. I couldn’t stand in the way of a person leaving a church that elevated some NT teachings as scriptural ordinances and dismissing other NT teachings as unimportant and not worthy of consideration.

Having said that, I realize that we are all human and that none of us get it all right.

So I offer two balancing statements to the theme I’ve been promoting so far today.

- 1. At the end of the day, a body of believes does have to make a decision on some of these things. They can't go on in limbo forever.**

But just because we have to make a decision on which ordinances we are going to practice as a group does not mean that we then have the authority to discourage individuals from teaching and practicing the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles that we've not yet developed a conviction for. Neither do we have the authority to go around the world telling everyone else which ordinances must be practiced today in order to be saved, and which scriptural ordinances practiced by the early church ones are not necessary for today. We should be willing to declare all the teachings of Jesus but stop right there. We should stay open minded towards practices that Jesus taught and that were practiced by the early church rather than saying that they are not necessary for today.

In my mind that is the height of religious pride to think that WE teach "the all things" of the Gospel, and that other Christians don't. It is arrogant to think that it is unnecessary to consider early church practices such as anointing our heads before fasting or lifting holy hands, just because we've never done it yet.

Did you know that foot-washing and anointing with oil were not practiced by many Anabaptists for the first few hundred years and that they were not elevated to "Christian ordinance" until about a hundred years ago? Did a couple men a hundred years ago receive special revelation that there are now "seven scriptural ordinances"? If we believe that, then we are not unlike the Mormons who receive special revelation from their leaders about God's will for the age.

- 2. It is true that we do need to submit to a brotherhood. That is biblical.**

But I would say that those of us from Anabaptist background should not be the ones that chuck this down the throats of those who are coming into the church.

It works best if those who have decided to forgive us for overburdening them and have decided to love us anyhow, if they would be the ones to teach this principle to others who are coming to God.

I was not given the topic of why I would encourage people to join a conservative Anabaptist church. I was given the topic of "What might "no greater burden" look like in 2014". So I realize that this topic was not a pep talk for conservative Anabaptism. (I sometimes speak about the many values that a person can gain by linking up with conservative Anabaptists.)

However, I believe that looking at a topic like this is all part of welcoming people from non-plain background into our plain churches. There are things we need to seriously think about if we want to see a greater number of people welcomed into our Anabaptist type churches.

One man from non-Mennonite background told me. "Mennonites have such high expectations. It is hard for us to meet their standard".

An Anabaptist pastor from another country told me, "If we had the kind of expectations for those new to the faith that many churches in the USA have, we would never be able to bring people into our churches."

Perhaps we need to give people more time to develop convictions on matters on their own. When our churches develop a conviction on a matter, it often takes us a few years or a few decades to develop that conviction.

Perhaps we should be more understanding of those who are coming into the church and look for ways to treat a person as a full brother or sister in the Lord even if they are not yet fully convicted of the things we are.

Well, there are many more things we could talk about ---

Excellency issues –

Good music vs. inferior music

Thriftiness vs. being a free spender –

Should these things interfere with how we relate to brothers and sisters of the household of faith?

Maturity issues - There are some things we expect from the mature but we should not expect from those who are just coming to the Lord.

Wisdom issues – Some things are lawful, but not expedient. What do we do about those?

I do believe that God has answers for us in 2014. I believe that God does have a way for us to navigate our way through these cultural issues and New Testament teachings. There are ways we should look at all these different categories of practices and issues that are pleasing to God.

We won't get the answers to these questions just by reading the scriptures, even though they are very important. If we only rely on the scriptures, we will end up with 20,000 or more different denominations like the Protestant world has achieved.

Conservative Anabaptists are headed that direction. We already have about 50 constituencies as a result of schisms and differences of opinion.

So in addition to the scriptures we need to give the Spirit of God freedom to teach us and to help us make proper conclusions as we read the scriptures.

We need the testimony of faithful Christians throughout history. How did they look at these issues?

We need the input of other faithful Christians around the world. How are they handling these issues?

Born and raised Anabaptists tend to think of Christian groups as being either right or wrong. They believe that a person needs to choose the Anabaptist package or the Protestant package or the Catholic package. (and they don't realize that they have been heavily influenced by both Protestants and Catholics.)

While there are notable distinctions between these three groups, I'm concluding that churches do not fall neatly within these three groups. I'm not sure it is as simple as what we often like to make it.

I think there are things we could learn from other Christians about what it means to be a follower of Jesus without giving up any of the core values at the heart of early Anabaptism. In fact, there may be Protestant and Catholic individuals who could help us recover the core values at the heart of Anabaptism.

To adopt good things from other Christians without departing for the core values of Anabaptism is not an easy thing to do. (As we have seen over and over in Anabaptist churches over the centuries.) The tendency is to accept their whole package including their view of salvation, etc. rather than allow them to teach us a few things about following Jesus that we were not doing and still keep our Anabaptist theology.

For example, there are non-Anabaptists who invite strangers and travelers into their houses and let them sleep on their couch. There are non-Anabaptists who do not lay up treasure on earth but give just about everything to the poor and needy. There are non-Anabaptists who invite folks other than their kin and relatives whenever they make a dinner.

There is much we can learn from others.

So...

Are there burdens we can lift if we would teach more of the "all things"?

Are there burdens that Peter and Paul would encourage us to continue observing ourselves but not put them on those who are "coming to the Lord"?

I suggest that there are several ways to find out.

First... Study the teachings of Jesus, the book of Acts, and the other Epistles that deal with these topics

Second... Listen to people like the Apostle Paul who are forming churches of those who are coming to the Lord from among different ethnic groups and see what kinds of burdens we should maybe relieve people of. You don't want to ask people like Demetrius and Hymenaeus, but it would be good to ask people like the Apostle Paul and Silas and Barnabas what they learned as they've attempted to plant churches among people of other cultures.

Third... Talk to the people who come from other ethnic backgrounds and ask them what kind of burdens they think we should relieve people of. (Typically conservative Anabaptists like to tell seekers what burdens they should be willing to accept.)

What if after they've been with us for awhile we would ask them which ones we should relieve them of? I find that of those who are headed the Anabaptist direction, there is quite general agreement about what values they want us to keep, and what values they don't think should be imposed on others. That is what a weekend like this is for. To talk with some of these folks and find out what these values are.