



Faith Builders

Discipling the head, heart, and hands

ISS. 149 ∞ FALL 2023

Five Fruits of Repentance

BY JOSH COBLENTZ

Josh Coblentz, pastor at Meadville Mennonite Chapel, introduces us to an old Anabaptist writing that describes a fruitful way of life.

Isaac the Syrian of the seventh century said, “This life has been given to you for repentance, do not waste it on other things.”

I am reminded of Isaac’s words when I read the early Anabaptist leader Pilgram Marpeck (1495-1556). Marpeck wrote a letter, “Five Fruits of Repentance,”¹ which I would like to introduce to you. By introducing this letter, I hope to whet your appetite to read Marpeck for yourself. This letter gives us a picture of the way to walk united with Jesus Christ and His church in humility, obedience, and love amidst the noise of conflicting and deceiving voices in the world.

Summary of “Five Fruits of Repentance”

In this letter, Marpeck describes the nature of repentance and faith in Christ. He begins by acknowledging that we have cause for thankfulness when someone comes to Jesus Christ in true repentance, grieves for and confesses their sins, and receives grace, forgiveness, comfort, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. Forgiveness is granted in Christ’s sacrifice of death on the cross and the shedding of his blood. “Such forgiveness, however, takes place only in the fellowship of saints, which alone received such power from Christ.”²

“I write this,” he says, “so that we may take careful note of the witness within our hearts so that when we sin, we may perform and complete the true fruit of repentance, in order that the wrath of God and the curse of Christ may not come over us to our destruction.”³

As the story of the fig tree illustrates, unfruitfulness and the curse of Christ—that is, sin and divine judgement—is indeed frightful and alarming. Those who are “earnestly shocked” by it are “prepared for and led to the Lord Christ.” The fruit of repentance “proves itself true in suffering, sorrowing, fear, and pain of conscience, in deep affliction.”⁴ Marpeck does not want his readers to be ignorant of the path of Christian faith or to expect to take short-cuts. This would be to miss out on the blessedness of eternal life in Jesus Christ.

The first fruit is “that the sinner confesses himself guilty of eternal death under the stern, serious righteousness and wrathful vengeance of God; that he becomes ashamed and completely battered and broken in his own eyes, and with fear and trembling appears before the face of God helpless, without comfort, and completely forsaken of all

creatures in heaven and on earth.”⁵ There is no respect for good intentions or pretension of self-worth. “He has and knows, seeks and recognizes no help in himself or in anything else.”⁶ Before receiving consolation, the sinner must “taste and eat” this “bitter fruit.”⁷

This first fruit of repentance is not the suffering of self-pity and flagellation, nor a display of false humility, nor the pangs of deflated pride. It is genuine acceptance and a willing descent, with Christ, into the death and hell that one’s own sin brings. This fruit is not optional to Marpeck. “Whoever does not find Christ in this depth ... will not find Him in the height.”⁸ However, the forgiveness and grace of God are not given us by reason of our drinking “the cup of the suffering of guilt.”⁹

The second fruit comes as God “allows a small light of hope of His grace to shine along with His condemnation.”¹⁰ As hope enters, the sinner can “anticipate that grace with patience and become aware that he cannot rob God of His grace or seize it.”¹¹ Waiting before God is itself a “blessedness,” a grace from God. In fact, the impulse to seize God’s grace or control it reveals to us again the root of sin as the pride of presumption. “Oh, God, how utterly impatient we are to await your comfort! We like to assume that You would prostrate yourself at our feet with Your comfort and mercy.”¹² Presuming on the grace of God deceives us and leads us astray.

The third fruit is that the sinner finds more sorrow in “what he has done against God” than in “what he must suffer in consequence.”¹³ The fruit is manifest as he accepts the consequences of the sin and does not seek a way out “until God’s will has been satisfied in him.”¹⁴ Penitents do not desire to be rid of the suffering, but of the sin itself and “commit their guilt to the intercession of the innocence of Christ” and “await patiently the release from their suffering through Him who has delivered them from their sins.”¹⁵

The fourth fruit is that the penitent does not allow sin to rule, but “accepts the command of Christ, that he should no longer commit sin” and “lives in the will of God and not in wickedness.”¹⁶ Without this fruit of obedience, “repentance is in vain and the Son of God is crucified and trodden under foot.”¹⁷

The fifth fruit is that “I do not blame any creature in heaven or on earth for my sin.”¹⁸ Marpeck suggests that those who blame another creature for the source of their sin actually blame God. They wish that the true God and his creatures were the liar and doer of wickedness, rather than regarding God and his creatures as good. Penitents forsake self-justification and resist temptation to blame



The five fruits represent what is useful in repentance when we sin and the shape of the life that follows from it—penitent, humble living in true surrender and joyful dependence on Jesus Christ.

others, accepting complete responsibility for the impertinence of sin.

The letter concludes, “God our heavenly Father grant us grace, and the Lord Jesus Christ, that we be truly humble before the great majesty and goodness of our Father and that we present and reveal ourselves and confess honestly and truly without any falseness of spirit.”¹⁹

Reflections on “Five Fruits”

For a while, I did not understand why Marpeck calls these five points “fruits of repentance.”²⁰ When he refers to John the Baptist’s words, “bear fruits in keeping with repentance,” I believe Marpeck is describing a penitent life before God. The five fruits are not early steps of repentance after which one moves on to higher things. They represent what is needful in repentance when we sin and the shape of the life that follows from it—penitent, humble living in true surrender and joyful dependence on Jesus Christ.

Repentance involves humbling ourselves before God and one another. Humility begins in the knowledge of God and is nourished in the fear of God (Prov 3:5-8). The more we come to know Jesus Christ, the more we come to know ourselves truly. As we abide in Jesus, the Father prunes dead branches. James says to the church, “Confess your sins to another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (Jas 5:16). This takes humility. In fact, it requires constant, penitential self-emptying. The healing James speaks of is not the result of a safe or healthy church culture (though that is no evil), but of the unconstrained activity of the Holy Spirit and our yielding to Him in true surrender.

In public confession, the impulse of self-preservation, particularly the protection of one’s image, is renounced, and the Holy Spirit is free to do His cleansing work, more abundant “than all we ask

or imagine.” Satan would deceive us to think that this is the path of death and destruction, but it is, in fact, the way of life and peace in Jesus. Repentance yields “the peaceable fruit of eternal blessedness.”²¹

The kindness of God does not lead to lawlessness and licentiousness but to repentance, and repentance leads to the obedience of faith (Rom 2:4). Repentance aligns our heart with God, for in true surrender our will becomes one with His and His Spirit kindles pure love in our heart (1 Jn 4:7,19). When we repent, we are freed to extend the same to others, because His love comes into us and controls us (2 Cor 5:14). We are born of God, a new creation. We love our enemies and call all people to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, the one who loved us and gave himself for us. We are no longer slaves to corruption and sin but have the Life of God living in us. Our obedience is not perfect, but He helps us in our weakness. He enables us to manifest the five fruits and gives us the free and flourishing life that follows.

In this way, we glory in His might and yield our life to Him in love and obedience. Let’s not waste our life on other things!

¹ *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, Tr. and Ed. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, republished by Plough Publishing House, 484-497, hereafter *WPM*
² *WPM*, 486
³ *WPM*, 487-488
⁴ *Ibid.*
⁵ *WPM*, 489
⁶ *Ibid.*
⁷ *Ibid.*
⁸ *Ibid.*
⁹ *Ibid.*
¹⁰ *WPM*, 490
¹¹ *Ibid.*
¹² *Ibid.*
¹³ *WPM*, 491
¹⁴ *Ibid.*
¹⁵ *Ibid.*
¹⁶ *WPM*, 492
¹⁷ *Ibid.*
¹⁸ *WPM*, 492
¹⁹ *WPM*, 495-496

²⁰ For anyone interested in further reading, I suggest Hans Hut, “A Beginning of a True Christian Life” and Leonhard Schiemer, “Concerning the Grace of God; Concerning the Little Bottle” both available in *Jörg Meler’s Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*, edited by John Rempel from Pandora Press, 2010. Marpeck’s influence from these earlier South German Anabaptist preachers is evident. Anabaptism in South Germany, including Marpeck, interacted with and was influenced by the 14th-century text, *Theologia Deutsch* (for an English translation, I recommend Susanna Winkworth, *Theologia Germanica* Modern English Edition by Scriptoria Books 2014).
²¹ *WPM*, 496



Training Institute Expansion

After the completion of the Resource Group building, we began the FBTI Expansion component of the FB growth project.

The FBTI Expansion will create a classroom, music practice rooms, and study spaces for students and instructors. The design will improve traffic flow from the cafeteria to the East Wing and create a hub that will bring staff and students together for learning and formation.

The first phase is on track for completion by the end of September.



Financial Needs

For over 30 years, the Lord has provided the needed resources through you. Our new fiscal year began July 1, 2023. Faith Builders remains dependent on the support of the conservative Anabaptist community.

Our needs for 2023-24 include:

- Operational Donations \$363,270
- Growth Project \$942,898
- Scholarships \$100,000

If you prefer to give to Faith Builders anonymously, Anabaptist Foundation offers an advised gift fund that makes this possible. For more information email info@fbweb.org or call them at (800) 653-9817.

Winter Term

JANUARY 1 - FEBRUARY 2

This five-week term serves students from a range of ages and walks of life. Youth come seeking spiritual growth and academic study at the same time that seasoned ministry workers come for refreshment and learning.

For a full list of course descriptions and schedule: Visit FBEP.ORG/ST
 Email fbep@fbep.org
 Call (814) 789-4518, ext. 220

courses offered in 2024 include

Creating Life-Giving Spaces
 Cynthia Brubaker

Anabaptism as Worldview
 Steven Brubaker

Themes in Leadership
 Steven Brubaker

An Anabaptist View of Peace, Violence, & Politics
 Edsel Burdge

Early American Mennonite Thought
 Edsel Burdge

Understanding Abuse
 John Coblenz

Galatians
 Paul Lamicela

Understanding the Biblical Storyline
 Paul Lamicela

Issues in Church Leadership
 Melvin Lehman

Life & Leadership for Men
 Melvin Lehman

Music Fundamentals
 Nolan Martin

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Beginning Choral Conducting
 Brandon Mullet

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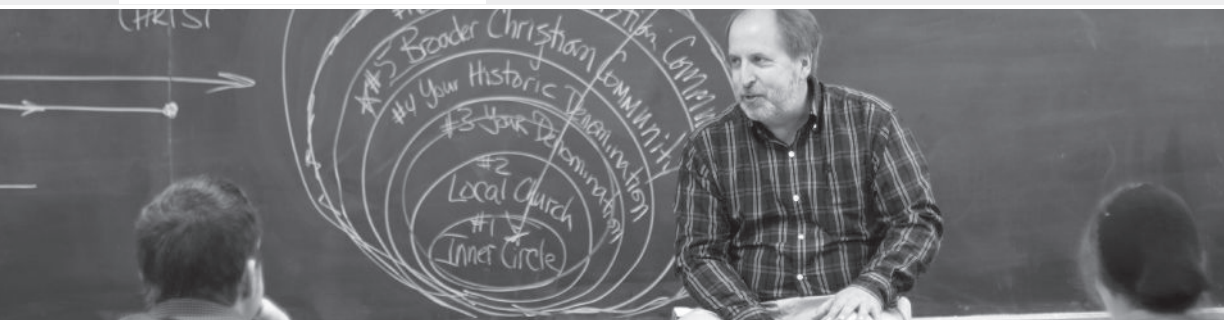
Early & Medieval Church History
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Systematic Theology
 Stephen Russell

Engaging Middle Eastern Culture, History, & Religion
 Reagan Schrock

Reading the Bible
 Kyle Stoltzfus

Additional courses to be confirmed.



Upcoming Events

Two-year studies begin · AUGUST 21

We’re delighted to welcome 21 new students for the 2023-24 academic year. They will join 18 returning students. We anticipate a rich year of learning together!

Teachers Conference

OCTOBER 6-8

Find details about this annual event for teachers at FBEP.ORG/TC.

Heart & Voice Men’s Choir

OCTOBER 10-12

The choir plans to give two programs in northern Indiana. Find details at FBEP.ORG/HV.

Open House · NOVEMBER 16-17

Experience FB for a day! We welcome parents, pastors, and potential students for this free, interactive event. Register at FBEP.ORG/OPEN-HOUSE.

Early Application Deadline

DECEMBER 1

To begin a two-year study program in August 2024, apply at FBEP.ORG/ACADEMICS/SEMESTER.

Winter Term

JANUARY 1 - FEBRUARY 2, 2024

Applications will be available late September. Apply at FBEP.ORG/WT.

Administrators Conference & Retreat · JANUARY 18-20, 2024

This annual event is designed to equip administrators with vision for schools. For information and registration, visit FBEP.ORG/ACR.

Personnel Needs

We are seeking applications for these staff openings:

- mentoring coordinator
- ministry apprenticing coordinator
- student recruitment coordinator

For information about these job descriptions or to request an application, contact Steven Brubaker: srb@fbep.org · (814) 789-4518 ext. 239



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28527 Guys Mills Road
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The Faith Builders newsletter is published quarterly and serves to inform, inspire, and equip its readers. Subscription is free upon request.

Study at Faith Builders!

EARLY APPLICATION DEADLINE: DECEMBER 1

Faith Builders Training Institute emphasizes a whole-person approach to education, through academic course work, hands-on apprenticing, and relational discipleship. In our two-year programs of study, we combine knowledge, understanding, skills, and vision to form people who can serve their geographic places and church communities with wisdom.

Faith Builders' coursework can be applied toward a college degree, enabling many students to complete a degree in as few as four or five additional semesters.

Find more information and begin applying at **FBEP.ORG/ACADEMICS/SEMESTER**. Students who apply by December 1 will receive an application decision by January 15. Browse options for scholarships at **FBEP.ORG/SCHOLARSHIPS**.

Students choose from three tracks of study:

TEACHER APPRENTICING
cultivates attitudes and skills necessary for faithful, effective service in Anabaptist schools.

CHRISTIAN MINISTRIES
cultivates attitudes and skills necessary for service in the ministries of the church, both at home and across the world.

GENERAL STUDIES
helps students prepare for further education and navigate that education with faithfulness.

