Volume #7, #2 April 2026

The ADC Disciple

Anabaptist Disciples of Christ is an affiliation of Conservative Anabaptist churches seeking likeminded fellowship, instruction, and accountability in church administration and congregational life in the Biblical pattern of the Apostolic church.

Anchored in Historical Anabaptism

Part III

by James Yoder

Conrad Grebel

5. They distinguished between the Living Word and the Written Word —

The Word of God for the Anabaptists was a Man and He spoke through the holy writings. The outer Word, they taught, is nothing but the lamp from which the light of the true Word shines. They did not teach "*sola scriptura*" as Huldrych Zwingli did; rather, they were people of the Man, Christ Jesus. "*Sola Christo*," (Christ alone,) became their motif. They were in community with Christ, which distinguished them as Christocentric believers.

To this point Hans Denck wrote, *"I value the Scriptures above all human treasure, but not as highly as the Word of God which is alive, strong, eternal, and free. The Word of God is free from the elements of the world. It is God himself. It is Spirit and not letter, written without pen or paper so that it can never be erased."*

Ulrich Stadler also wrote, *"The outer Word is only a sign of the inner Word, like the sign on an inn telling of the wine in the barrels inside. The sign is not the wine. It satisfies no-one's thirst. But we know when we see it that the wine is there."*

They never found conflict between the two if it was kept in proper sequence. One could say they viewed it considering a 1st and 2nd Things Model: *"The Living Word was first and primary, yet not detached from the written Word."* Pilgram Marpeck wrote, *"The outer, preached or written word, and the inner Word are One."* They also taught, *"When one is truly surrendered to Christ, there is perfect unity between the voice of Christ in their hearts and the holy writings in their hand."*

When I first heard this distinction being taught some twenty years ago, it was difficult for me to wrap my mind around this distinction. I could not differentiate between the two until I heard it explained this way. It's possible to memorize the entire Scripture (the written Word) and one's life not be touched or changed significantly. However, it is unlikely, or nigh impossible, to internalize Jesus (the Living Word) in meaningful ways and one's life not be changed. The two will never conflict with each other but only a head knowledge of scripture is not enough to change the inner man. This requires an encounter with the Living Word.

6. Their view of eschatology fueled their passion —

Robert Friedmann writes, *"It is a well-known fact that the early period of the Age of the Reformers was strongly eschatologically oriented."* To Martin Luther the Book of Daniel was a real *"comforter in these last days."* To wide circles the pope was the anti-Christ and was so predicted in the pamphlet literature of the time. Everyone felt deeply regarding current issues and read the Apocalypse with intense anticipation. There was a certain spiritual alertness taking place.

The eschatological mood did not generally lead to speculations of dates and cataclysmic change but led rather to a firm conviction of the imminent return of Christ. This in turn re-

leased new energies, mainly in the form of a tremendous missionary zeal.

Some would argue that the Anabaptists' view on eschatology was the fuel that ignited the raging fire that could scarcely be quenched. Due to the severe persecution that they faced, many believed they were living in the Last Days. In fact, virtually everyone agreed that the End Times had arrived. And while this perception misguided a few leaders to rogue action, for the greater part it motivated the Anabaptists to spread the good news hither and yon.

"...He compels me to speak so I cannot be silent..."

In fact, they could not keep silent. They did not keep silent! And they did more than just speak. They wrote. From the beginning of the movement their writings shook the populace. Roman Catholics burned them. Luther cursed them. Zwingli and Bullinger wrote scathing replies. Practically all European governments made the publication, distribution, and ownership of Anabaptist writings a capital offense. Yet they continued to write pamphlets and tracts. Hans Denck, a widely traveled messenger from Southern Germany wrote, *"I open my mouth against my will. I speak reluctantly about God, but He compels me to speak so I cannot be silent..."*

Conrad Grebel, who was one of three that was involved at the first rebaptism, wrote, *"I am full of words and the spirit of my belly constrains me. Behold my belly is as new wine without a vent, which bursts the wineskins. I shall speak and I shall breathe a little more freely: I shall open my lips and make answer."*

Even women exercised remarkable informal leadership in proselytization. In many ways, women were the mainstay of the underground church. They hosted meetings, provided a communication network, evangelized among their peers, and fed refugees and traveling men. They also provided support for the families of those in prison. Women chose, of their own volition, to suffer imprisonment, torture, and death for their faith. From figures available to us, it's estimated that a third or more of all Anabaptist martyrs were women.

As early as two years after the birth of the movement, people suspected magic as the source of their "strange" beliefs. Strange stories began to circulate that the Anabaptists had a magic container, a little vial, filled with a liquid and one sip of its contents was enough to bring anyone under their power. To this Leonard Schiemer took the time to answer this foolish story. He wrote, *"Well, you godless crowd, let me tell you how it is. Let us say you are right. Let us say it is true that we must all drink from a little vial. ...You say that whoever takes a sip from the vial is permanently changed. How true! For the liquid in the vial is made from nothing else than a struck down, ground up, rubbed apart, and sorrowful heart pulverized in the mortar and pestle of the cross, ...and it is the liquid which our dear brother and friend, Christ Jesus, drank – mixed with vinegar and gall."*

Without doubt, it was the Holy Spirit fire within, rather than a potion, that was the secret of their strength! Their decisions, convictions, and actions were filtered through the lens: *"In light of eternity, does it matter?"* And if it mattered, they took action. The rest they saw as residual weight that needed to be set aside so they could *"run with endurance the race God set before them."*

A lingering question remains. How have the descendants of such a Spirit-led, passion-filled people fared 425 years this side of history? Obviously, only eternity will tell. Undoubtedly there are those who have stood on the shoulders of these men and woman and reached higher. They have been *"salt and light"* in a troubled world. They continue to come back to scripture and desire to emulate the faith and practice of the early church. They refuse to bend and to wan or wane. These we commend.

There is also the stark reality that others may not have fared so well. Perhaps they have left the faith entirely and for these our hearts grieve. May the Spirit of the Living God breathe life and flesh into their dry bones before it is eternally too late. This knowledge should motivate us to keep spreading the good news of the gospel.

"In light of eternity, does it matter?"

There is, however, also a segment of people who have not left the faith but have transitioned back to Augustinian belief and practice. They give lip service to God but the inconsistencies of a lifestyle compared to Scripture seems rather crucial. Is their error greater than men like Luther, Zwingli, or Calvin, who were attempting to find their way out of a darkened church era and perhaps didn't have the enlightened teaching that many of us have today? We don't know and neither are we given to judge the faith or motives of others, but we leave it to God who alone judges righteously.

It does, however, beg several questions. Has embracing western Christianity blurred the lines of distinction or has it given greater clarity to the faith? Does it move the heart toward greater or lesser degrees of assimilation to worldly forms and values? Perhaps the best, and most probing, question one might ask is whether current beliefs and practices matter considering eternity? If it does, then it ought to matter to us.

Ultimately, as did our predecessors, our goal and passion in life ought to be to exalt Christ, equip our members for ministry, and edify the body of Christ. As I ponder this stewardship, it seems imperative that we not waste the core values entrusted to us from the past. May we instead use these historical teachings to anchor us to a deep faith in Jesus and to help our fellow men arrive home safe.

Used with permission.

James Yoder serves as lead pastor of Berea Christian Fellowship in Nappanee, Indiana. He and his wife, Gladys, have six children.

Resources from which I have taken quotes:

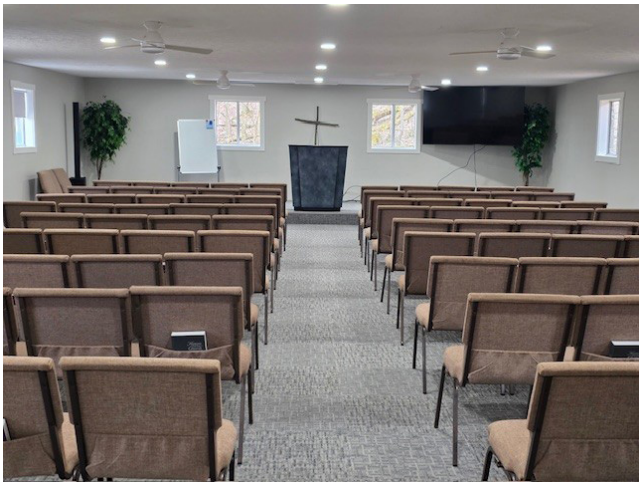
- Anabaptist History and Theology – Snyder
- Cathedrals, Castles, Caves – Yoder
- The Theology of Anabaptism – Friedmann
- The Secret of the Strength – Hoover
- Romans - Bercot

ADC Church Profile —

Gospel Revival Fellowship, Loudonville, Ohio was founded January 1, 2024.

The leadership team consists of John Kauffman, Pastor; with Joe Troyer, Henry Swarey, and Edward Kauffman serving on the Leadership Board.

Current membership is 40.



GRF was developed organically as the group sensed differences between their understanding of the gospel and the way it was being presented in the church group from which they came.

PASTOR SPOTLIGHT

Matt and Abby Miller serve at Followers of Christ Assembly, Louisville, Ohio.

Matt and Abby have four children – Alexis (22); Juda (18); Hosea (13); and Eleanor (8).

Matt was ordained as an Associate Elder in March 2019.

Matt works as a partner in M. Miller Concrete LLC.

Matt reflects on his pastoral journey – *"I will never cease to be amazed of the love and grace of our wonderful Saviour Jesus Christ and how he came to this earth to offer hope for humanity. I am ever so grateful for His love and the precious blood that He shed for me. May His name be praised forever!*

I count it a privilege to be a part of His Kingdom in a small congregation here in Louisville, Ohio, that I am very blessed to be a part of. I humbly accept the calling the Lord has given me and pray that I would remain faithful to the end! To God be the glory, great things He has done!"

Matt and Abby are actively involved in the Not Forgotten Foundation, a ministry started by a young couple in their church and which serves widows.

Matt recommends the following books and podcasts – *King Jesus Claims His Church* by Finny Kuruvilla; *The Doctrine of God* by Michael Lewis; and *Strength to Strength* and *Sound Faith* podcasts.

Thank you Matt and Abby for your service to the Church of Christ!

The ADC Disciple

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April 2026

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"Beware, I pray thee, of presuming that thou art saved. If thy heart be renewed, if thou shalt hate the things that thou didst once love, and love the things that thou didst once hate; if thou hast really repented; if there be a thorough change of mind in thee; if thou be born again, then hast thou reason to rejoice: but if there be no vital change, no inward godliness; if there be no love to God, no prayer, no work of the Holy Spirit, then thy saying *'I am saved'* is but thine own assertion, and it may delude, but it will not deliver thee."

CHARLES SPURGEON