



[HOME](#) > [ANABAPTIST BELIEFS](#) > WHY NOT BE ANABAPTIST?

Why Not Be Anabaptist?

BY [LYNN MARTIN](#)

This article is an argument for Anabaptism for those who are confused by endless doctrinal disputes. You may see good things in different Christian denominations, but you also see the holes in the narratives of different sides. So how are you going to pick which Christian denomination you should be a part of? You just want to be true to the Christian faith. Why is it so unclear who is right?

Protestants and Catholics are always poking holes in each other's definitive doctrines. It's easy for each side to point out the faulty exegesis or leaps in logic that are required in order to uphold the other side's teachings. Each side rightly points out that the other side's doctrines—faith alone, *sola scriptura*, Calvinism, the Papacy, prayers to saints, and apostolic succession—are not found in Scripture or the history of the early church. Yet, while each side is great at exegesis and logic when disputing the other side, and they can easily show that the other side is adding their doctrines to Scripture, they can't see their own flaws when they go to defend their side.

You can bypass this by simply setting aside those extra doctrines and living as [the early church](#) did. You don't need to join an [Anabaptist](#) church to do that, but you might find it helpful. Why not be Anabaptist?

The Perks

- You can hold to all the central doctrines of the Christian faith, like salvation through Jesus Christ, our God and King—but you don't need to

understand how it all works; you can simply live it out faithfully, as thousands of Anabaptists do today.

- You can believe and live as the apostles and the early church did for its first approximately 300 years, and as many of the persecuted church has believed and lived throughout the ages.
- You don't need to believe any of the specific doctrines of Catholicism and Protestantism that aren't scripturally sound. You can just take Jesus and the apostles at their word.
- There may continue to be verses in Scripture that are hard to understand. But there will be few verses that won't just immediately fit into the Anabaptist worldview, and for those that won't, you won't need complicated interpretations to fit them in.
- You can be part of a movement which was never a state church and which didn't expand through making new Christians by force or by baptizing infants. You get to transform peoples lives around you through Jesus' way, which is antithetical to the world's way.
- You get to be like Jesus in the Anabaptist way of theosis, often called "Christlikeness," in which we model the suffering love and faithful obedience of Jesus. You don't become Christlike through spiritual disciplines hardened into formulae over the centuries (though some of them can be very helpful), but through *discipleship*: following Jesus and obeying his example and teachings.

If you join the Anabaptists, you won't be part of a perfect church, but at least you probably won't be part of a church that believes its teachings to be infallible. You probably won't be part of an intellectual or educated church, but at least you probably won't be in a church that's wedded to a particular theological system which needs to be read into Scripture. Your church might ask you to live according to certain agreed-upon standards that aren't directly from Scripture, but at least they won't expect you to disobey Christ by going to war.

Dear brothers and sisters among the Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants: There is no need to obsess over obscure doctrines that somehow divide cleanly between orthodoxy and heresy. Many people have been declared heretics for believing doctrines that have nothing to do with either Scripture or following Jesus, such as the Filioque, monoenergism (yes, those are words, and they have bothered some people quite a lot), and the precise wording that for some reason we need to use about the incarnation. And at the same time, the central aspects of Christianity, such as living as Jesus' disciples, have often been neglected. These heady ideas may be interesting questions, but they don't define Christianity. The essence of Christianity doesn't hang on church councils and doctrines which were decided through infighting, and enforced through persecution.

Yes, I do love you Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants. I know that you are sincere. But these things bother me, and they're why I am still an Anabaptist.

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17 thoughts on “Why Not Be Anabaptist?”



DUARTE

FEBRUARY 22, 2023 AT 8:42 AM

Could you quote a church father that supports anabaptism?

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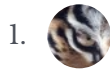


LYNN MARTIN

FEBRUARY 22, 2023 AT 2:09 PM

Hi Duarte, yes indeed. The consensus of the church for the first three hundred years is very similar to Anabaptism (with some minor disagreements), so I would point you to Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Ignatius, Clement of Rome, and Clement of Alexandria, for a start. For the exact quotations, just read the articles on this website, such as these: [/early-christian-quotes](#)

[Reply](#)



DEREK RAMSEY

APRIL 11, 2023 AT 2:18 AM

1.

In my opinion, you can trace most of what is now Anabaptist doctrine back to virtually any point on the timeline, including, as you've noted, many early church fathers.

Have you done much research period from ~395AD (when Roman Catholicism took the civil power of the sword) to the Piedmont Easter massacre of the Waldensians in 1655AD? In my research, I've come to believe that the remnant of Christ's church was preserved during that time within the Alpine regions of Europe. Christian groups, such as the Albigensians, Cathari, Waldensians, Bogomils, Patarines, Paulicians, and others, maintained the faith tradition in those mountain regions, relatively safe from organized and targeted persecution.

The Waldensian document "*La nobla leycon*" claims to be written in the early 12th century and reads like a modern Protestant creed, despite being written long before the Protestant Reformation. How did the Waldensians write a Protestant creed three centuries before Luther, unless there was a faith community that extended farther back in which to base it on (as the document itself claims)?

[Reply](#)



[LYNN MARTIN](#)

[APRIL 19, 2023 AT 5:40 PM](#)

That era of history is a very interesting one, and I'd love to look into it more. I know a bit about the Waldensians, but not about the others. I think there were many faithful Christians both in and out of the RCC during that time, and I think it would be good to know more about the ones who were outside of it.

[Reply](#)



[MARY](#)

[JUNE 5, 2023 AT 7:40 PM](#)

My frustration as a Protestant is that the churches I've attended are so focused on the right theology and the sermons seldom encourage godly living. Often Protestant elders absolutely fail on very simple christian teachings on marriage, divorce, modesty, headcovering for women, staying away from accumulation of wealth, staying away from serving in the military and other professions that present conflicts of interest for a christian, etc. Also, I find that the elders of these Protestant churches have a REAL problem with meeting 1Timothy 3 elder qualifications....There are often elders with divorce in their past, wrecked lifestyles, or some other major sins that disqualify them....yeah they may have the Theological degrees but I don't see where theological degree is even a qualification for elders, it doesn't exist in the New Testament. I am rather discouraged when I see the total disregard for Jesus's words, however I follow Jesus no matter what church I go to, I listen to Jesus, I simply don't listen to elders who clearly don't follow Jesus.

[Reply](#)



[LYNN MARTIN](#)

[JUNE 9, 2023 AT 3:35 PM](#)

Thanks for the comment, Mary! Yes, many people today find themselves in your position. I hope you can find a church that encourages you in your commitment to following Jesus.

[Reply](#)



TAYLOR

DECEMBER 8, 2023 AT 2:20 PM

Neither Christ nor the apostles told soldiers to leave their posts, and there's no explicit statement against "accumulating wealth" in your words. Why would Paul tell wealthy Christians to be generous with their wealth? Wouldn't he have, according to your statement, told them to give it all away? That's not what he says. I'm totally against a "prosperity gospel" but I think things are read into the scriptures that aren't there.

[Reply](#)



MARY

DECEMBER 8, 2023 AT 11:14 PM

Taylor,

Matthew 6: 19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." —I think Jesus meant what He said, don't have it as a goal to become wealthy and if you are already, use your wealth to bless others instead.

As to soldiers in the New Testament, the fact soldiers were mentioned that came to the faith, is a negative statement, not a positive one about their professions. Just like mentioning tax collectors, prostitutes and other types of sinners were dining with Jesus and were called to repentance.

[Reply](#)



TAYLOR

DECEMBER 10, 2023 AT 10:26 PM

"A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children: and the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just."

[Reply](#)



TAYLOR

DECEMBER 10, 2023 AT 10:30 PM

Also please quote the Scrupturw where he tells soldiers to leave their post. I think you're reading that into the Bible. But if you can show me where it says that and not just where you claim it means that, I would have to accept it.

[Reply](#)



MARY

DECEMBER 11, 2023 AT 12:15 AM

Matthew 26:52 Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword.

Ephesians 6:12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day,...

Romans 12:19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." 20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.



TAYLOR

DECEMBER 8, 2023 AT 2:11 PM

If you believe as the Christians of the first 300 years believed, do you also believe in the real presence in the Eucharist?

[Reply](#)



LYNN MARTIN

DECEMBER 14, 2023 AT 5:56 PM

I do.

[Reply](#)



TAYLOR

DECEMBER 15, 2023 AT 7:30 PM

As I understand from reading anabaptist history, they claim that many groups outside of the catholic (small “c”) church were the true Christians. This presents a problem as the Early church fathers claimed these groups were gnostics (among other claims) and didn’t believe in the real presence. Please correct me if I’m misunderstanding something as am not a historian, just interested in history.

[Reply](#)



[LYNN MARTIN](#)

[DECEMBER 19, 2023 AT 9:34 PM](#)

Good question. I’m not familiar with the Anabaptist history on this point, but you’re probably right. I don’t think that either the Anabaptists or the early church fathers were quite right on this issue. It wasn’t as simple as “the institutional church apostatized, and only the dissenters were real Christians,” but nor was it as simple as “none of the dissenting groups contained true Christians.” I’m not talking about the Gnostics; they were definitely not Christians. However, there were groups like the Novatianists and the Donatists, who I think were real Christians, even though I believe the main church was probably right in both cases. Does that answer your question?

[Reply](#)



[SEEKER](#)

[SEPTEMBER 23, 2024 AT 5:48 PM](#)

While this post is a bit older, and I tend to be an observer on online discussions this post did catch my attention. My view is that this author is being quite disingenuous with his argumentation or is simply naive to the realities of Anabaptist praxy. The framing of the first sentence alone is indicative of the fallacious nature of the argumentation. Would the author be so kind as to list the number and types of Anabaptist communities that are not in communion with each other due to endless doctrinal disputes? I’m afraid not.

Prot’s and Catholic’s always poking holes in each other’s doctrines. Are Anabaptist’s any less skilled in this practice? While generally shunning public confrontation and debate, likely due to the inculturation of non-resistant ideas, Anabaptist tend to carry out their doctrinal disputes through passive-aggressive means. As someone who has spent many years traversing the inside corridors of Anabaptism, I see virtually no difference in the broader sense. And so, to present a favorable argument for Anabaptism without acknowledging the

flaws and inherent internal conflict seems poised to inflict harm to the occasional seeker that finds himself testing out the waters of this supposed third way.

So, bypass all the “extra doctrines” and live just like the early church.... The spiritual pride and generational arrogance needed to make this type of claim is almost enough to make one weep if it were not so patently absurd. Why not be an Anabaptist???

You can hold all the central doctrines of the Christian faith....except...

- a. The centrality of the Eucharist as taught by all of the ancient faiths and the unanimous consent of the church fathers to the **sacramental** nature of this act of worship. What could possibly be more central than the words of Christ in John 6: “Truly, truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, you have no life in you.” ? Or when he said, “Take eat this is my body” Saint Ignatius of Antioch emphasized this as he traveled to his death by stating that all those who deny the real presence of Christ are heretics and should be shunned. Now the author may or may not hold to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. If he does, he will not voice this opinion out loud in any reputable conservative Anabaptist church least he risk being branded as having fallen into the “false teaching” of that Romish “whore”.
- b. The covenantal nature of Faith and the teaching and practice from early records of the glad welcoming into the Church, by baptism, of the youngest members of the human race. Rather, you believe in innocence in infancy, a poorly defined addition of “age of accountability”, and an experiential salvation based on the person’s ability to make a reasoned profession of faith. You will have no answer to the question of salvation for the person who dies around the “age of accountability” or the mentally handicapped person who is unable to make a reasoned profession of faith.
- c. Of Baptism, you will deny the salvific effects of baptism. Rather, you will hold to a symbolic view, where baptism is an outward sign of a “supposed” inner reality.
- d. You will deny the authority of the Church and it’s prerogative to proclaim doctrine. You will hold, more or less, to the Protestant teaching of “sola Scriptura”. As stated by this author “just take Jesus and the apostles at their word” This provides blatant cover for the very real reality in Anabaptist churches of every man becoming his own pope. If you don’t like what your elders are teaching, proclaim your greater spiritual insight, attract half of your church to your views and just go start your own splinter group. This belief and practice completely disregards the fact that the church is” the pillar and ground of the truth” according to scripture.

2. Why not be Anabaptist? By becoming Anabaptist, you will find yourself drawing nigh to and becoming enmeshed in an ancient heresy that continues to be repackaged and held forth as truth. Namely, Gnostic Dualism. How can I make those claims?

- a. As alluded to earlier, you will generally deny the **sacramental** nature of most of church life and practice. No life in baptism, no Christ in communion, no charism in offices, no grace in marriage. Most
- b. And least this be cast aside, please be aware that early founders of this sect were enmeshed in these heresies. A certain Menno, denied the hypostatic union of the two natures of Christ in one person. He viewed the Mother of God as a simple vessel through which the “celestial flesh” passed through. His compatriots, the Swiss Brethren, likewise, being influenced by Zwingli in his humanistic teachings denied the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Incidentally, due to their assimilation of this symbolic view of church life they were also fierce iconoclasts.
- c. This dualism will influence the way that you view the material world. Generally, you will take the gnostic view that the world is evil. You will generally view anything related to the body as inherently evil. Greater emphasis will be placed on inner “knowing” and mystical new birth “experiences”. For example, following this experience, you will be asked how you “feel” by your concerned parents and pastor in order to validate the authenticity of your experience.
- d. This gnostic view will influence how you see the government and “outsiders”. You will adhere to a more or less strict separation from them. Until,...you awake to the realization that you and your people can profit greatly by sheltering in the jurisdiction of a friendly government that will tolerate your non-participation in its affairs while fully utilizing the economic structures it has developed. Of outsiders, you will generally be suspicious. If you are an outsider, you will generally not be accepted into this cultural maze before the second or third generation of your family becoming part of a church.

Let the seeker beware my dear friends; seek the Lord with a pure conscience. May all who seek Him come to truly know Him.

[Reply](#)



[LYNN MARTIN](#)

[SEPTEMBER 23, 2024 AT 6:33 PM](#)

Hi, I appreciate the comment. I’ve considered taking this post down, since I felt that it could sound arrogant, even though I certainly don’t mean it that way. Your comment is the first negative feedback that I’ve heard on it, so so far I have left it up, in case it could be useful. If others misunderstand it as well, I may take it down, though, because I don’t want to come across the wrong way.

However, I don’t think you’ve understood my point. Let me clarify some things I said:

My point about the first sentence is *not* that Anabaptists all agree on doctrine. Certainly they don't! My point is just that Anabaptists have traditionally given members a fair amount of latitude with what they personally believe, without claiming that those who believe untrue things are damned. Instead, Anabaptists focus on living a holy life. Protestantism and Catholicism, on the other hand, often anathematize people who are living holy lives, but who simply disagree on some doctrines that were never part of the original faith.

You said, "to present a favorable argument for Anabaptism without acknowledging the flaws and inherent internal conflict." My article links to [this post](#), where I'm very clear about some of Conservative Anabaptism's major flaws, of which I'm very critical. I recognize this "third way" is nowhere close to perfect. We have our share of issues, and I'm sorry.

I'd like to clarify a place where you misunderstood what I was saying. You said, 'So, bypass all the "extra doctrines" and live just like the early church.... The spiritual pride and generational arrogance needed to make this type of claim is almost enough to make one weep if it were not so patently absurd.'

That's not what I said. What I said was,

You can bypass this by simply setting aside those extra doctrines and living as the early church did. You don't need to join an Anabaptist church to do that, but you might find it helpful.

Notice that I didn't say that Anabaptists live "just" like the early church. They don't, typically, just as most Protestants and Catholics don't either. And I also said that you don't need to join an Anabaptist church to live like the early church. It's just that "you might find it helpful." Which I've found to be true in my experience, and many other Christians have as well. But you might not find it helpful, in which case I would encourage you *not* to join an Anabaptist church.

I don't agree with most of your characterizations of Anabaptism in the section that follows. Here's what I'd point out:

Though Anabaptists usually teach against the "Real Presence" view, many Anabaptists hold it. Some Anabaptists, like me, also believe that baptism is **sacramental**. My whole church believes that baptism is salvific. There is freedom to believe these things.

You're right that we oppose infant baptism, since there is good reason to think that it's not the earliest practice. I concede that the pre-Nicene church undoubtedly practiced both infant baptism and believers' baptism of the children of Christians, and I think a good case could be made for allowing both practices. Anabaptists only allow one of them. But then, most other churches also only allow one or the other.

We *do* hold that the church has the authority to proclaim doctrine. It's just that the church is not infallible.

And we don't hold to Gnostic Dualism. It's true that Menno didn't believe that Jesus derived his flesh from Mary. But that's not the prevailing Anabaptist view. You said,

'Generally, you will take the gnostic view that the world is evil. You will generally view anything related to the body as inherently evil. Greater emphasis will be placed on inner "knowing" and mystical new birth "experiences". For example, following this experience, you will be asked how you "feel" by your concerned parents and pastor in order to validate the authenticity of your experience.'

Certainly not. We don't believe that the world or the body is evil. We believe that both are good gifts from God. Some churches focus on "knowing" and "experience," but those are Protestant influences. I grew up in a historic Anabaptist church that actively taught against that focus. And I was not asked how I "felt" when I committed my life to Christ.

"You will adhere to a more or less strict separation from [the government]." Just as the early church did.

But your last point is sadly a very accurate one for some Anabaptist churches:

"If you are an outsider, you will generally not be accepted into this cultural maze before the second or third generation of your family becoming part of a church." You're right that this is true in some churches. Sadly so. This stands as a terrible indictment against these churches, and I apologize on their behalf for anyone who has suffered because of this wrong.

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