

12 Principles of Anabaptism

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<https://usmb.org/anabaptism/>

**A High View of the Bible.~James 1:22-25,
2 Timothy 3:16-17**

While not worshipping the Bible itself, for that would be biblology, Anabaptists accept "the Scriptures as the authoritative word of God, and through the Holy Spirit...the infallible guide to lead men to faith in Christ and to guide them in the life of Christian discipleship. "Anabaptists insist that Christians must always be guided by the word, which is to be collectively discerned, and by the Spirit.

**Emphasis on the New Testament.- Matthew 5:17-20,
John 5:39-40**

Since Christ is God's supreme revelation, Anabaptists make a clear functional distinction between the equally inspired Old and New Testaments. We see an old and a new covenant. We read the Old from the perspective of the New and see the New as the fulfillment of the Old. Where the two differ, the New prevails, and thus Anabaptist ethics are derived primarily from the New Testament.

**Emphasis on Jesus as central to all else.~John 1:1-5,
9-14, 16-18**

Anabaptists derive their Christology directly from the word and emphasize a deep commitment to take Jesus seriously in all of life. Such a view runs counter to notions that the commands of Jesus are too difficult for ordinary believers or that Jesus' significance lies almost entirely in providing heavenly salvation. Rather, salvation of the soul is part of a larger transformation.

Pietists stressed a personal, spiritual relationship with Jesus which transformed a person's life.

The necessity of a believers' church.- John 3:1-8

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Anabaptists believe that Christian conversion, while not necessarily sudden and traumatic, always involves a conscious decision. "Unless a person is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Believing that an infant can have no conscious, intelligent faith in Christ, Anabaptists baptize only those who have come to a personal, living faith.

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Voluntary baptism, together with a commitment to walk in the full newness of life and to strive for purity in the church, constitutes the basis of church membership.

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**The importance of discipleship.
Matthew 16:24-27**

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Becoming a Christian involves not only belief in Christ but also discipleship. Faith is expressed in holy living. In Christ, salvation and ethics come together. Not only are we to be saved through Christ, but we are also to follow him daily in obedient living.

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Thus, for example, Anabaptists from the beginning renounced the oath. They determined to speak truth. "For them there could be no gradations of truth-telling." Anabaptists continue to teach that salvation makes us followers of Jesus Christ and that he is the model for the way we are to live. Pietists expressed this same commitment by gathering in small groups to study the Bible together. They felt true Christians had to practice their faith everyday, not just in the Sunday worship service.

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**Insistence on a church without
classes or divisions.-
James 2:1-11**

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The church, the body of Christ, has only one head. While acknowledging functional diversity, Anabaptist believers set aside all racial, ethnic, class and sex distinctions because these are subsumed in the unity and equality of the body.

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**Belief in the church as a
covenant community.
Acts 2:42-47**

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Corporate worship, mutual aid, fellowship and mutual accountability characterize this community. An individualistic or self-centered Anabaptism is a contradiction in terms.

**Separation from the world/
Church as visible
counterculture.
2 Corinthians 6:14-18
Matthew 5:1-12**

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The community of the transformed belongs to the kingdom of God. It functions in the world but is radically separate from the world. The faithful pilgrim church sees the sinful world as an alien environment with thoroughly different ethics and goals. This principle includes separation of church and state. Therefore, Anabaptists reject all forms of civil religion, be it the traditional Christendom or more recently developed forms of Christian nationalism.

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Radical Pietists felt that the state churches of their day were too worldly to really be a church. They were convinced that separation from the world also meant separation from churches too comfortable with the world. They formed small congregations outside the established churches, thus earning the name "radical".

As a united fellowship of believers every Anabaptist congregation models an alternate community. Such a covenant community functions as an authentic counterculture.

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**Belief that the gospel includes
a commitment to the way of
peace modeled by the Prince of
Peace.-
Luke 6:27-36**

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Here Anabaptists differ from many other Christians. Anabaptists believe that the peace position is not optional, not marginal, and not related mainly to the military. On the basis of Scripture, Anabaptists renounce violence in human relationships. We see peace and reconciliation - the way of love - as being at the heart of the Christian gospel.

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God gave his followers this ethic not as a point to ponder, but as a command to obey. It was costly for Jesus and it may also be costly for his followers. The way of peace is a way of life.

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**Commitment to servanthood.
Mark 10:35-45**

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Just as Christ came to be a servant to all, so Christians should also serve one another and others in the name of Christ. Thus, separation from a sinful world is balanced by a witness of practical assistance to a needy and hurting society.

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**Insistence on the church as a
missionary church.
Matthew 28:16-20**

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Anabaptists believe that Christ has commissioned the church to go into all the world and all of society and to make disciples of all people, baptizing them and teaching them to observe his commandments. The evangelistic imperative is given to all believers.

These principles constitute the essence of Anabaptism. While each emphasis can be found elsewhere, the combination of all twelve constitutes the uniqueness of Anabaptism.