

Anabaptist Doctrine

Separation

“Anabaptism was a socio-religious movement that was neither Catholic nor Protestant. It was a Christian movement of the most radical sort in that it questioned virtually all the assumptions upon which sixteenth century society, culture, and church rested.”

-Walter Klaassen

“By creating a new, though small, society under the discipline of Christ, they judged as un-Christian the old societies, which would not easily be persuaded of their own errors. By naming a believer a priest, they started European humanity on the road to democracy. By their egalitarian teachings and brotherhood structures, they undermined established totalitarian authority. By their rejection of infant baptism, they destroyed conventional social control. With their life-style they exposed hypocrites and unsettled the rich. Through their nonresistance they confounded their enemies, and by their exemplary obedience short of an oath they thoroughly frustrated magistrates and monarchs.”

-Frank Epp

One such monarch was Emperor Philip, who was determined to limit the erosion of his empire. Philip forbade laymen to teach the scriptures under threat of execution.

- Women who were caught teaching scripture were to be buried alive
- Men and women were often burned at the stake

Separation from Civil Authority

For the Anabaptists, ultimate authority was found only in Christ and the Holy Scriptures. While they taught that obedience to local governments was important, on the most important matters, spiritual matters, the local church should be in charge. They advocated for a complete separation of church and state.

1. Read the following passages and describe what they teach about the authority of the state and the authority of the church (God).

Matthew 22:21; Galatians 3:28

Cultural Separation

The Anabaptists were all too aware of the hypocrisy found throughout the Catholic Church. They put a great deal of emphasis on spiritual discipline and the use of excommunication. Most of the conflict Anabaptists found themselves involved in occurred within the church.

Some believed that the ban should only be used at communion. Others, such as Jacob Ammann, were stricter and argued that “complete social discipline was necessary to guard against the encroachment of new social customs and re-absorption into society.”

Thus many Anabaptists chose to live in communities separated from the outside. This was done to both protect themselves from physical persecution but also to guard against social customs that could harm these communities.

Some Anabaptists, like Ammann, taught that believers should look different than those around them. This included things like:

- Fancy clothing (pride)
- Clean shaven face (military style of the period)
- Long hair (pride)

Read the following passages and respond to the questions below:

1 Timothy 2:9-10; 1 Corinthians 11:14-15; 1 John 2:15-17

2. Should Christians dress ‘differently’ than the rest of society? Explain.

3. Should Christians remove themselves from secular society so they can better practice what the Bible teaches?
