

## Revivals And Church History :: Key Differences Between Evangelicals and Anabaptists by By Nolan Martin

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### Key Differences Between Evangelicals and Anabaptists

*By Nolan Martin*

Evangelicals have more influence on Anabaptists in the United States than any other Christian group. Because they believe exactly the same as the Anabaptists on so many issues such as the authority of Scripture, we feel a certain kinship to them and desire to minimize our differences. When Anabaptists need Bible study resources, they turn to Evangelical books and commentaries. Many Christian radio stations are operated by Evangelicals, and many Anabaptists who have radios tune in and listen to Evangelical teaching and music. This Evangelical influence has a tendency to erode the distinctive beliefs of many Anabaptists even more than physical persecution did in Reformation days.

What are the distinctive beliefs of Anabaptists? The first difference, and perhaps the only difference many Anabaptists would mention, is their belief in nonresistance, which Evangelicals do not hold. Although this visible divergence is a significant difference, it springs from deeper doctrinal differences. The most basic of these differences lies in the interpretation of Scripture. Although both groups believe in the authority of Scripture and would even use similar methods to interpret Scripture, Anabaptists approach the Bible with some different presuppositions that lead to vastly different outcomes.

First, an Anabaptist interpretation of Scripture is centered on the teachings of Christ and his call to discipleship. The rest of Scripture is then viewed through this lens and interpreted so as not to contradict the teachings of Christ, the head of the church. This produces different conclusions than when interpretation is centered on the writings of Paul as often seen in Evangelical teaching. A Christ-centered interpretation maintains that Christ's teachings can be followed with God's enabling grace and must be followed if an entrance into the kingdom of God is to be gained. A Paul-centered interpretation tends to overemphasize man's sinful nature and makes man utterly helpless in the pursuit of good. Consequently, many of Christ's teachings are considered unattainable in the present. In fact, some who interpret the Bible this way postpone the validity of Jesus' teachings to some future time. God's mercy and forgiveness is emphasized in this system rather than careful obedience.

Second, Anabaptists believe the New Testament takes precedence over the Old Testament. They believe the Old Testament points forward to Christ, whereas the New Testament is the final and ultimate revelation of Christ. On the other hand, many Evangelicals have a "flat Bible," putting the Old and New Testaments on the same level. Except for Jewish ceremonial and dietary laws, Evangelical morality closely resembles Jewish morality. Oaths, accumulation of wealth, participation in war, and divorce and remarriage are acceptable for Evangelicals because they were acceptable in the Old Testament. For the Anabaptists, the New Testament teaching on these issues trumps the Old Testament teaching.

Third, Anabaptists believe the Bible is best interpreted when the believer is committed to obeying it. Early Anabaptists were concerned about how the learned of their day "twisted" the Scriptures to get around the force of a command. Anabaptists today reject the common distinctions made between New Testament commands on the one hand that are binding both in form and spirit upon Christians for all time and those on the other hand that are to be observed only in spirit. Many hold that to the former class belong such items as baptism and communion, whereas to the latter class belong such commands as to greet one another with a holy kiss, to wash one another's feet, and to anoint the sick with oil. Anabaptists hold that these New Testament commands as well as communion and baptism are to be observed by all Christians everywhere until the end of the age. Mennonite theologian J. C. Wenger said, "There is no exegetical consideration against the observance of feet washing, for example, which would not also bear against the observance of baptism."

Moving from Bible interpretation, another root difference between Anabaptists and Evangelical Protestants is their view of salvation. Anabaptists emphasize that salvation is by grace through faith that works (notice it's not faith plus works.). They believe that at conversion God purges a person's past sins by Christ's blood and changes that person at his very core, freeing him from the enslavement of sin and enabling him actually to live a righteous life. God declares the sinner righteous because of Christ's work on the cross and his present work in the heart of the believer enabling him to live righteously in reality. Right living is therefore crucial evidence that an individual has repented, believed, and yielded to Christ.

This is in contrast to the Evangelical view that justification is the result only of an accounting procedure in the books of H

heaven that happens totally outside the person. According to this view, when a person says the sinner's prayer, his sins are deducted from his account, and Christ's righteousness is credited to his account instead. Thus, when God looks at the person, all He will ever see is Christ's righteousness regardless of how the person lives (or dies). God declares the sinner righteous no matter what is true in reality. In this view, right living should follow conversion but is completely unrelated to God's evaluation of the person and will affect only his rewards.

Evangelicals see a huge, oversized cross on top of Scripture that obscures Christ's call to discipleship and renders obedience unnecessary. Anabaptists, on the other hand, see no distinction in the Bible between a disciple of Christ and a saved person. As Milo Zehr wrote, "Protestants believe Christ did enough on the cross to deliver those who believe from the guilt of original sin, and Anabaptists believe Christ is doing enough day by day to deliver people from both the guilt and practice of sin."

The Evangelical view of salvation leads to careless living in many cases. For example, the divorce rate among Christians in America is nearly equal to that among non-Christians. Is this not a small window giving a view of something seriously wrong within popular Christianity? Most Evangelical Christians see no advantage to living a holy life because of their view of salvation.

I need to clarify that Anabaptists do not believe a person is perfected at conversion. According to 1 John 1:7, "If we walk in the light . . . the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." If we walk in the light perfectly, we do not need cleansing from sin, so John apparently believed a person walking in the light may still stumble at times and need cleansing. The two false beliefs that we must avoid are these: (1) We never sin after conversion. (2) We can habitually sin and have fellowship with God. The cleansing of sin does depend on our walking in the light, which I understand to mean striving to obey Christ and do what is right.

The Bible says Noah, Abraham, and Job were righteous in the sight of God. Yet we know they weren't perfect. We also know that their righteousness was not just the result of an accounting transaction in the books of Heaven, but rather a righteousness (right living) that was a basic pattern in their life. What kind of affront to Satan would it have been if Job's righteousness had been just the result of bookkeeping in Heaven?

Another difference regarding salvation is the status of children. Although Anabaptists are diligent in teaching children the word of God, their focus is not on converting the child as soon as possible. They believe their children are safe and covered by the blood of Jesus until they reach the age of accountability, at which time the child will either accept or reject Christ. This age varies between individuals, but for most it falls between the ages of 8 and 17.

Evangelicals believe children are lost until they accept Christ. Their focus therefore is on getting the child saved. Many of their children will say the sinner's prayer by the age of 7. To me, child evangelism does not differ much from infant baptism. I think I could get most 3-year-olds to say a prayer accepting Christ into their heart. But 3-year-olds know nothing of discipleship, and unless they are taught discipleship later in life when they can truly understand what it means, they will never become true disciples of Christ, which is what a Christian is. Thus, sadly, many say a sinner's prayer by age 7, but by 17 they are following the world rather than Christ.

Anabaptists believe their chief citizenship is in the heavenly kingdom ruled by Jesus Christ. Thus they believe it is not their job to keep order in the kingdoms of this world wherein they are only pilgrims, but rather to invite people into the heavenly kingdom. Evangelicals believe Christians need to help keep order in society. They have never been able to figure out, however, how to follow the laws of Jesus' kingdom, which he taught in the Sermon on the Mount, and still keep order in the kingdoms of this world. It seems they have ended up dropping the heavenly kingdom values.

Because of Jesus' commands to "love your enemies" and "resist not evil," Anabaptists believe strongly in nonparticipation in war. Yet they hold that the state is necessary and ordained by God to keep order in an unregenerate society by using carnal force (Rom. 13). They therefore do not oppose the death penalty, recognizing that the government "bears not the sword in vain." They also are not, as Harold Martin says, "Humanitarian pacifists crusading for the end of all wars." Their attitude is that they will thankfully accept the protection the state provides as the Apostle Paul did. But if that protection should fail or if the state should turn against them, they will rather suffer violence than harm a fellow human being.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Catholic and Protestant controlled governments in Europe did turn against the Anabaptists and persecuted them with terrible cruelty. Despite the horrible persecution Anabaptists maintained their beliefs and multiplied. We are grateful the Protestants no longer persecute us and are rather apologizing for their forefathers' persecution.

secution. Anabaptists need to stay on the alert, however, so they do not now unconsciously and gradually surrender their beliefs during this time of geniality. The issues for which the Anabaptists were persecuted have not been resolved. We made it through the physical persecution. How are we doing in the face of the subtle onslaught of Evangelical books and media?

I do not wish to present the Anabaptists as "having it all together." We certainly have quite a few problems of our own. Wherever we are right, it is by the grace of God. I also do not want to present Evangelicals as being all wrong. As I said at the beginning, we have a lot in common. Many of them despite their embrace of what I believe to be wrong doctrines are sincerely seeking God and striving to do His will. I do think it is important, though, that people understand that there are significant differences which go deeper than dress and nonresistance and which make Anabaptist denominations necessary.

Furthermore, I call us all to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ while living up to the light we have already received.

**Re: Key Differences Between Evangelicals and Anabaptists by By Nolan Martin - posted by JB1968 (), on: 2010/3/25 8:1**

This is pretty good. Another key difference would be that Anabaptists hold a distinct view of separation from the world, while being a light in the world, while many evangelicals have left this view of Christ's call to be different from the world.

**Re: Key Differences Between Evangelicals and Anabaptists by By Nolan Martin - posted by Areadymind (), on: 2010/3/2**

After years of being an Evangelical, having studied the word for myself, I would have to conclude then that I fit into this mold...strange. I too have concluded a lot of these things myself over the years as I have studied the word. I cannot understand why so many believers promote war and political gain, it is so against the teachings of Jesus it is not even funny. Maybe there is a revival of the Anabaptist spirit going on :).

**Re: Key Differences Between Evangelicals and Anabaptists by By Nolan Martin, on: 2010/3/25 10:07**

Excellent post brother Greg.....

I think that many "Evangelicals," will be shocked to realize that they are actually "Anabaptists." Actually I do not care for the title. It was a given name and typically, down through the ages, the various names that God's remnant Church were given were names given by their oppressors.

"Another difference regarding salvation is the status of children. Although Anabaptists are diligent in teaching children the word of God, their focus is not on converting the child as soon as possible. They believe their children are safe and covered by the blood of Jesus until they reach the age of accountability, at which time the child will either accept or reject Christ. This age varies between individuals, but for most it falls between the ages of 8 and 17.

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This is one of the key reasons that we see almost 90% of Evangelical children walk away from their "faith," when they go to college, it's because they were never saved in the first place. As an ex-Catholic, I know that almost every one of my friends, as soon as they left their parents' homes, stopped going to Mass, it's the same thing because the origin is the same, a State Church or denomination designed to incorporate the entire population rather than be a Church of believers.....brother Frank

**Re: - posted by JB1968 (), on: 2010/3/26 7:46**

I would consider myself an "evangelical". My wife and I are intensely involved in child evangelism (VBS, SS, and Good News Club) and believe that children can be saved as a child. Some of the greatest saints were saved as children (Matthew Henry, Adam Clarke, etc.). But, I do not know of many evangelicals who believe children are lost before the age of accountability. We can not put an age on it. Only God knows the age. But if we as a church do not reach the children and take the time to do it intensely, Satan and his demons will and are working overtime to get the children. They must be taught and reached with the gospel before they are hardened to it. Why wait until Satan has his tentacles around them before we put whole hearted effort into it? Let's do it before that happens, if possible. If more parents and adults took an interest in children, maybe more of them would be saved from a life wasted in sin.

Another thing, just because a child prays the sinner's prayer (or an adult) it does not necessarily mean they are saved. Salvation is of the heart. They must be taught the Gospel line upon line. Evangelism and discipleship must be kept in balance. It is sad that some just count how many pray the prayer. Salvation is more than that.

Many calvinists may not agree but it is possible to backslide. It does not have to happen but it does in some people. I have seen children saved and live for Christ. Amen!

**Re: - posted by jlosinski, on: 2010/3/26 11:41**

My son trusted in Christ for salvation on March 20th, he is five years old. We had returned home from a church service (we left early) and he was sitting on the couch, I thought he was tired or perhaps sick as he was very muted and downcast. He said that he was sad because he felt like someone was was going to throw him to the devil to do bad things. I asked him if he was feeling bad about bad things he had done in the past and if he didn't want to do bad things anymore. I explained to him how Jesus took the punishment that we deserved because of our sin and how one needed to trust in him to be found innocent before God. There was no sinner's prayer and no "asking Jesus into his heart" I doubt he would even know what that meant. After having him repeat back to me (to see if he understood) what Jesus did for us and what his problem was (sin) I told him that he could pray to trust in Christ if he felt the need to do so, and he did, a simple prayer to ask Jesus to help him. When asked later what Jesus did for him, he replied " he brought me back to worship God".

He has been raised in a Christian home and has learned the way of Christ, but I never pushed him for any type of decision, this was entirely the Holy Spirit's leading.

**Re: - posted by ginnyrose (), on: 2010/3/26 21:42**

Quote:  
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This quote sent my mind down an interesting trail: how many Anabaptists/Mennonite youths leave the faith due to higher education? I know many who have college and are still faithful. If there is any leaving they go to a more liberal Mennonite church - although this usually happens after attending a Mennonite college which will be so very liberal. Maybe I will have to email Hans Mast and ask him...

ginnyrose

**Re: - posted by ccchhhrrriiisss (), on: 2010/3/27 2:07**

Hi Sister Ginny...

Quote:  
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Quote:  
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This is one of the key reasons that we see almost 90% of Evangelical children walk away from their "faith," when they go to college, its because they were never saved in the first place. As an ex-Catholic, I know that almost every one of my friends, as soon as they left their parents homes, stopped going to Mass, its the same thing because the origin is the same, a State Church or denomination designed to incorporate the entire population rather than be a Church of believers

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I have thought about this for a long time (although not dealing with the Anabaptist or Mennonite sects, but with the Body of Christ is general). I have come to the conclusion that something might not have been "right" in the hearts of those people who would so easily be persuaded away from the faith in college. Now, I don't have any particular statistics (like the 90% figure quoted earlier). However, if that number is truly accurate, I wonder just how many of those 90% have EVER had a real encounter with Jesus Christ?

I attended "secular" universities. However, all of those college students who were legitimately firm in their faith BEFORE college seemed to have remained firm THROUGHOUT the extent of their education. This is not to say that they didn't go through a maturing process or have questions. However, I can't think of any "secure" believers (if that makes sense) who "fell away" due to education, the "secular" environment in the school/workplace, etc...

Is it possible that many of those "90%" who supposedly fell away simply did not truly or intimately know the Lord to begin with?

**Re: , on: 2010/3/27 9:06**

"Is it possible that many of those "90%" who supposedly fell away simply did not truly or intimately know the Lord to begin with?"

That would be the exact point. The figure comes from Barna.....Frank

**Re: - posted by ccchhhrrriiiss (), on: 2010/3/27 12:05**

Hi Frank...

Quote:

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That would be the exact point. The figure comes from Barna.....Frank  
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Do you have a link to this article or statistics? I am unfamiliar with Barna and would like to view their research (namely, the condition of that 90% BEFORE they left for college).

Regardless, I still must question the actual spiritual condition of ANY believer who would "fall away" from God and then point (or have someone else point) to education as the "cause." I think that the root cause is something else. My college experience, my wife's college experience and the college experience of other believers that we knew (who were already established in the faith) actually served to STRENGTHEN our walk with God.

Yes, we went to "secular" universities -- but this is a "secular" world. We also work and interact with unbelievers on a daily basis. Of course, we continue interacting with believers too (as frequently as possible). Most importantly, we fellowship with the Lord more than anything else. It is (and should be) the focus of our lives. Perhaps this relationship is the key to avoiding such a "fall?"

Perhaps there are many people who lack that relationship with Christ but somehow still consider themselves "Christian?" I would think that this need of preeminence regarding an actual relationship with God isn't confined to any particular sect...but is true of all believers. We should always endeavor to continuously walk with God anywhere and everywhere "in the wilderness of this world."

**Re: , on: 2010/3/27 12:15**

"That would be the exact point"

I was agreeing with you.....Frank

**Re: , on: 2010/3/27 12:16**

This is comment I made on the other thread, but would probably fit well here.....

"There is no 'age of accountability,' in the New Testament. According to Jewish law, the age which a young boy became a man was 13 and a young girl 12. This is when they celebrate their Bar Mitzvah. At this age they become responsible for their own actions. In the New Testament, there is not a single example of a child 'coming to Christ', only adults. One could mention 'household salvation,' which is typically mentioned in this discussion, but that proves nothing and would be an argument from silence. One cannot build a theology or a doctrine on no Scriptures. Therefore, children, up to a certain age, must be considered innocent. Evangelicals encourage very young children to get 'saved.' Catholics baptize their babies to save them from Limbo (even the Catholics did not want to argue that children go to hell so they created limbo). Given what Scripture does say and given the attributes and nature of God, the better assumption is that children are innocent and therefore go to heaven if they die, this makes more Biblical sense. Only doctrines of men would contradict this." .....

brother Frank

**Re: - posted by ccchhhrrriiiss (), on: 2010/3/27 12:25**

Hi Frank...

Quote:

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I was agreeing with you.....Frank  
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I sort of figured as much. I was just looking for the particular statistic that you quoted. I have heard stats like this mentioned in the past in regard to people who "fall away" during college (or, more typically, after children turn 18). I found the "Barna" website (if this is the same firm that you mentioned, but I can't find that particular set of statistics or the article itself).

My wife and I were discussing this recently with some local young adults who are also college students. We were trying to point out that they "don't have to be a statistic." We stressed that the important thing is to know Jesus well enough (particularly in the prayer college) that they would never even consider turning away from our Lord.

**Re: - posted by wind\_blows, on: 2010/3/27 12:37**

Hey CHris

Quote:

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However, I can't think of any "secure" believers (if that makes sense) who "fell away" due to education, the "secular" environment in the school/workplace, etc..  
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I know of several who have fallen away while in college. I know one guy who was on fire for the Lord, I never knew someone who loved Jesus as much as this guy did. He was so committed and then he went away to school and by his own admission he is no longer walking with the Lord. He told my husband that once he came under the influence of so many of the professors and the peer pressure it just began to work on his heart and life. He said that while at one time he would have defended his faith now there are just too many questions that he can not find answers to. We have shared with him and prayed for him but he is into heavy metal music, partying, and living with his girlfriend. All I can say is if he lacked a



relationship with the Lord before he left none of us saw that and we were together often. I am not saying it was just going to college but there were many factors in the life of going to college that have played a part to where he is now.

There are others as well but as you say who knows what the influences are that caused this. I just know that going away to college seemed to be the common denominator for them. Perhaps if there had been other strong believers around him to encourage him that may have made a difference?(don't know) Just know its really heartbreaking to see where some of them are at now.

in Him  
ellie

**Re: - posted by ChrisJD (), on: 2010/3/27 12:48**

Hi everyone,

Chris, about this,

"...and then point (or have someone else point) to education as the "cause." I think that the root cause is something else."

We have been discussing something similar in  
([https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?mode=viewtopic&topic\\_id=33016&forum=48&start=10&viewmode=flat&order=1](https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?mode=viewtopic&topic_id=33016&forum=48&start=10&viewmode=flat&order=1)) this thread.

In the book we are talking about, the author puts forward that both Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were once Christians and had expressed strong Christian ideas in their writings. In the case of Engels, he says that his faith was severely shaken by a Theologian named Bruno Bauer. He quotes Bauer from a letter he had written to a friend:

"I deliver lectures here at the university before a large audience. I don't recognize myself when I pronounce my blasphemies from the pulpit. They are so great that these children, whom nobody should offend, have their hair standing on end. While delivering the blasphemies, I remember how I work piously at home writing an apology of the holy Scriptures and of the Revelation. In any case, it is a very bad demon that possesses me as often as I ascend the pulpit, and I am so weak that I am compelled to yield to him... My spirit of blasphemy will be satisfied only if I am authorised to preach openly as professor of the atheistic system."

This man admits to pronouncing blasphemies so great that the little ones hearing him have their hair standing on end.

The Lord Jesus warned about scandalizing the little ones that **do** believe in Him (Mark 9:36,42). According to the Greek dictionary, that is what the word means that is translated *offend* in that passage.

It defines it more fully this way:

G4624

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skandalizo&#772;

skan-dal-id'-zo

To "scandalize"; from G4625; to entrap, that is, trip up (figuratively stumble or entice to sin, apostasy or displeasure):

- (make to) offend.

The New Testament warns about the serious nature of teaching and setting forth doctrine and I do not think this would exclude teaching and education in general, especially if it includes lies and deception, worldly philosophy and criticism, an

d whatever else that can be concocted in order to **sow doubts into the minds of others about the Word of God.**

It was the express and exact purpose and tactic of Satan to do just that in the garden when he asked, hath God said?

The root cause of any of our spiritual maladays may be more complicated than one thing. While that may be the case, we have need of being vigilant to guard against what we know can make us sick, in our spirits.