

Emerging Voices | What Anabaptists Can Teach SBC Churches

Baptist ecclesiology has always been a double-edged sword.

On one hand, Baptist churches have the autonomy to decide where the Holy Spirit is leading them.

On the other hand, the lack of oversight of Baptist churches can lead to some horrible places as seen in the Houston Chronicle [investigation](#) on Southern Baptist churches.

There was recently a Religious News Service [article](#) interviewing other Baptist groups like the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and the Alliance of Baptists about what these groups are doing to address sexual assault in local congregations.

They each lamented the double-edged nature of Baptist ecclesiology, but there are still some tough questions on how to deal with sexual assault on a national scale.

Is it possible to do so while retaining our Baptist ecclesiology? I believe there is if we will look to the Anabaptists.

Anabaptists and Baptists share a similar heritage out of what was known as the Radical Reformation.

In fact, it is commonly debated on how much influence Anabaptists had on Baptists as early Baptists spent time in Holland living among them.

One of the people credited with founding the Baptist faith, John Smyth, even became a Mennonite (one of several groups that emerged from the Anabaptist tradition). That said, Anabaptists and Baptists share a similar ecclesiology.

In 1527, Anabaptists came together and drafted what came to be known as [The Schleitheim Confession](#).

The second article lays out what is known as the ban:

“We have been united as follows concerning the ban. The ban shall be employed with all these who have given themselves over to the Lord, to walk after Him in His commandments; those who have been baptized into the one body of Christ, and let themselves be called brothers or sisters, and still somehow slip and fall into error and sin, being inadvertently overtaken. The same shall be warned twice privately and the third time be publicly admonished before the entire congregation according to the command of Christ (Matthew 18). But this shall be done according to the ordering of the Spirit of God before the breaking of bread, so that we may all in one spirit and in one love break and eat from one bread and drink from one cup.”

This way of doing church discipline is outlined in Matthew 18:15-19. Perhaps, in our current day and age, we need to reclaim what it looks like to do church discipline correctly.

Many Baptist churches today lack the imagination to see this form of church discipline carried out. There are few who preach on this passage and fewer who live it out.

Maybe what Anabaptists show us is that the issue with dealing with sexual assault in Baptist churches isn't about lack of oversight, but lack of community.

There is the lack of a safe space where victims of sexual assault can come and express their grievances without feeling shamed or like it is their fault.

There is the lack of accountability with our leaders who have abused their power to manipulate others.

There is the lack of community, which carries out the alternative witness of Christ to the world.

We Baptists have forgotten what church discipline should look like.

Perhaps it's time to look at Anabaptists to form our imaginations on how to carry this out in our Baptist congregations today.

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Anabaptists for years have been dealing with sexual assault themselves. Maybe we need to start a conversation with them on how best to live out Christ's witness in the day and age of the #metoo and #churchtoo movements.