

Why We Are Not Anabaptists

Deuteronomy 13; 1 John 2:15–23

The title of this morning's sermon is "Why We Are Not Anabaptists." I'll explain that title later in this sermon, but first, consider the connection between our Old and New Testament texts.

You have to look carefully to see it, but the connection is the phrase "going out from." In Deuteronomy 13:13 we read: "Corrupt men have *gone out from* among you." In 1 John 2:19 we have "They *went out from* us." What does "going out from" mean? The words themselves are plain and straightforward. *To go out from* means to leave a place. When I go on my morning walk, the first thing I do is to go out from my house. I put on my jacket, open up the door, step out onto the porch, and close the door behind me. I have a neighbor who walks a treadmill. But that doesn't appeal to me. I like to get out in the out-of-doors. I like to enjoy the blue sky, the sunshine and the fall mums. I like to wave at neighbors and other walkers. So I *go out from* my house to enjoy a walk.

But the phrase "going out from" in our two biblical texts today doesn't indicate simple movement from one place to another but something far more sinister: a deliberate renunciation of a previous commitment: an intentional abandonment and resolute rejection of Christ and his church. This, obviously, is a grievous sin with consequences for one's eternal destiny. As Scripture clearly teaches, to receive Christ is *life*; to reject him is *death*—eternal separation from God. Whoever believes in Christ has everlasting life; whoever rejects him perishes eternally—a punishment from which there is no recourse.

As we saw a few weeks ago, the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, was the Angel who accompanied the Israelites on their journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land. God didn't send a representative; he sent his only Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, to be with his people on their dangerous journey. Such love! This shows the continuity between the people of God under the old covenant with the people of God under the new covenant. There is *one* people of God—one way of salvation. Old Testament saints were saved by believing in the Christ who *was* to come. New Testament saints are saved by believing in the Christ who *has* come. All are saved by the same Savior: Jesus Christ.

The Reformed do not believe in "replacement theology." We do not believe that the church *replaces* Israel. Rather, we believe that there is *one* people of God throughout history. In Romans 11 the church is described as an olive tree. The unbelieving Jews were "broken off because of unbelief." Believing Gentiles were "cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature and grafted in" to the true olive tree, the church. And, going forward, ethnic Jews who do not continue in unbelief but profess Christ will be grafted back into that same true olive tree. All who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved!

So was Christ really present to save his people in Old Testament times? Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 10, beginning at verse 1, where Paul writes: “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For *they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.*” This is a remarkable statement; it is the Spirit-inspired explanation of what happened during the wilderness wandering. Clearly, it was *the Lord Jesus himself* who accompanied the children of Israel on their forty year journey to the Promised Land! At every stage of their journey it was “Christ” who gave Israel water to sustain life. Otherwise, they would have died of thirst. Where could they find a source of water that could supply a large company of two million thirsty and weary men, women and children trekking through one of the hottest deserts on earth?

As we saw a few weeks ago, the words “they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them” are a reference to the miracle of water coming out of the rock at God’s command. Calvin explains: “by the word *rock* is meant the stream of water, which never ceased to accompany the people. . . . [God] commanded the water that was drawn out from the rock to flow forth wherever the people journeyed, as if the rock itself had followed them.”¹ The rock didn’t move; rather, the water flowed and streamed with them through the desert.

Water is essential to sustain life. As the Israelites traveled through the arid desert, they drank from the spiritual Rock, Jesus Christ! If there is a sustained heat spell, you know that you drink more water. Jesus provided for his people the full amount of water necessary to sustain life in the oppressive desert environment.

This comports with what we know about Jesus. Here is the man who told the woman at the well, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you *living water*. . . . Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.”² The water that Christ gives is like no natural water on the face of the earth. Physical water cannot give everlasting life, but the living water that Christ gives, gives us everlasting life. Make no mistake. *Christ* is the sole source of living water! You can’t get it anywhere else. If your soul thirsts for God, that Spirit-wrought thirst deep in your soul can be quenched only by Christ. Nothing else can satisfy. The pleasures and distractions of this earth cannot satisfy. Only Christ can satisfy—both now, and throughout eternity.

But do not miss that the Bible makes it clear that it was the preincarnate “Christ” (Paul’s word) who supernaturally sustained his people in the wilderness—

¹ Calvin, commentary on 1 Cor. 10:4 (Logos Bible Software)

² John 4:10, 14

the same Christ who is presented to lost sinners in the preaching of the Gospel today. The Israelites were undeserving. They murmured and complained and found fault—constantly. They did nothing to deserve the water from the rock. It was a gift solely of grace. And what a gift! To *stay with* the covenant people meant life. To *go out from* the covenant people meant death.

And so it is today! Christ came to die in his people's place and build his church, his holy people. He calls us to join the heavenly throng marching to Zion by professing Christ publicly and taking our place in the local congregation, living in submission to the spiritual oversight of elders Christ personally calls as overseers, to shepherd the flock that he has put under their care. The overseers represent Christ. They are to preach and teach *Christ's* doctrine—whatever is explicitly taught or properly deduced from Holy Scripture. They have no authority to teach anything else. Christ's voice alone is to be heard in the church.

In our New Testament text we read, "Do not love the world or the things in the world." What is "the world"? Calvin explains: "everything connected with the present life, apart from the kingdom of God and the hope of eternal life." Now the physical things that we need to sustain life—food, water, clothing, shelter—are gifts from him who taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." We are to be thankful for them. But they are not an end in themselves. We must not turn them into idols. God himself must always be our God. We are not to love the world. Calvin warns that "in the world are pleasures, delights, and all those allurements by which man is captivated, so as to withdraw himself from God." How essential it is to guard our heart with all diligence and keep our eyes focused on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. If we are dazzled and captivated by the things of this world, we will make shipwreck of our faith.

Next, the apostle warns of "Antichrist." He introduces the subject as if it is a thing well-known to his hearers. Who is Antichrist? He is the *adversary* of the Messiah, who seeks to take the place of Christ. Notice that there is both "the" Antichrist (capital *A*), and there are "many" antichrists (small *a*). Since the time of the Reformation, the Reformed have understood "*the* Antichrist" to be the Papacy. The British edition of the Westminster Confession states that "there is no other head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ: nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense be head thereof; *but is that Antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the Church against Christ, and all that is called God.*"³ The phrase beginning "but is that Antichrist" was removed from the American edition of the Confession. Why did our theological forefathers call the pope "that Antichrist"? In Romanism the pope is considered to be the "vicar" or personal representative of Christ, having sole authority to speak for Christ when he makes a

³ WCF XXV.VI, quoted in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (<https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds3.iv.xvii.ii.html> accessed 10-18-25)

pronouncement *ex cathedra* (from the papal throne).⁴ The pope wears the papal crown and sits on a throne, symbolically usurping the place of Christ, the only King and Head of his church. But the Lord Jesus alone is “the King eternal, immortal, invisible,” to whom be “honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.”⁵ No single individual on earth has supreme and universal authority to speak for Christ. How does Christ speak? In “the Word of Christ,” the Holy Scriptures.⁶ The church has no authority to speak anything *contrary to* or *apart from* his written Word. The only one who has sole, exclusive, universal authority over the church is the ascended Christ, who rules his church by his Word and Spirit. Sadly, the pope of Rome is not the only one who makes this claim; rather there are “*many* antichrists,” and we who swear unconditional loyalty to the King of heaven need to beware of all of them.

Now we get to the “going out from” language that unites our Old and New Testament texts. Speaking of the “many antichrists,” the apostle John says, “They *went out from us*, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us” (1 John 2:19). John purposely uses language borrowed from our Old Testament text (“Corrupt men [who] have *gone out from among you* and enticed the inhabitants of their city, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods.’”) So going out from the covenant people had a recognized meaning. It meant apostasy, abandoning the true God and the true faith.

The apostle is describing men—women too, such as the false prophet Ellen G. White⁷—who had been part of the visible church. They confessed Christ and were baptized in his name. But they were false disciples and showed themselves to be such by leaving the church—what the Bible calls “apostasy” (ἀποστασία), a total abandonment of the true faith. The word occurs in the Greek translation of 2 Chronicles 29:19, which speaks of the temple furnishings that King Ahaz had “cast aside in his transgression [ἀποστασία].” Sadly, King Ahaz of Judah abandoned the true faith. He was the son of Jotham, who “did what was right in the sight of the LORD.”⁸ He had a godly upbringing, but he abandoned the true faith and walked in the ways of the kings of Israel.

But this is not exclusively an Old Testament phenomenon. In 1 Timothy 4:1 we read, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will *depart from the*

⁴ According to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, “vicar of Christ” is “a title of the pope implying his supreme and universal primacy, both of honor and of jurisdiction, over the Church of Christ” (<https://www.catholic.com/encyclopedia/vicar-of-christ> accessed 10-18-25)—something the Reformed churches categorically reject.

⁵ 1 Tim. 1:17

⁶ Col. 3:16

⁷ “White’s biographer and grandson, Arthur L. White, estimated that she reported receiving over 2,000 visions and dreams from God in public and private meetings throughout her life” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellen_G._White accessed 10-10-25).

⁸ 2 Kgs. 15:34

faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.” “Depart” is a verbal form of the word ἀποστασία. To “go out” from the church and renounce Christ is apostasy.

As we see in our New Testament text, there were many antichrists who “went out” from the church and abandoned the Christian faith. So take note! The visible church at the time of the apostle John was not a pure church made up of only faithful, born-again disciples. Clearly, those who were not truly born again had been admitted into the church. Scott Clark explains: “They were members of the visible assembly but they ultimately showed what they really were. They never were ‘of’ us. They never were ‘in Jesus’ or truly ‘in’ the vine. They were externally members of the covenant of grace but were never actually united to Christ.”

The visible church is mixed. It is not—nor has it ever been—totally pure, untainted by false disciples who, for wrong reasons, professed faith and were baptized, but who later “went out” from the church and so proved that they were never truly elect. There is NO church on earth today that is totally, 100% pure—made up only of genuine disciples who give a true profession and maintain their profession to the end of their lives. The church in every age has been composed of wheat and tares—those who truly believe, and those who, tragically, fall away.

So why the title of this sermon, “Why We Are Not Anabaptists”? Anabaptism was a radical Christian movement that emerged in the early sixteenth century, known for its repudiation of infant baptism. Anabaptists emphasized voluntary church membership, separation of church and state, and pacifism. They wouldn’t serve in the military, hold public office, or practice self-defense. They are the spiritual ancestors of modern Baptists, Mennonites, Amish, Quakers, Moravians, Plymouth Brethren, independents, and others. The term *anabaptist* is derived from the Greek ἀνά, *again*, and βαπτιστής, *baptizer*. An anabaptist would *baptize again*—that is, *rebaptize*, a person who had been baptized as an infant. In the early sixteenth century this was a crime, and some anabaptists faced great persecution for their beliefs.

So why do I bring up the Anabaptists? Here’s why: the Anabaptists aimed to establish a “*pure church*,” which they defined as *a community composed solely of regenerated individuals*—that is, those supernaturally born again by the Holy Spirit. They rejected the idea that just being a member of a church made one a Christian. They based this, in part, on the new covenant promise, “They shall *all* know me, from the least of them to the greatest” (Heb. 8:11). They reasoned that only those who truly—savingly—know the Lord are members of the new covenant community. They concluded that only those who could articulate a true faith in Jesus Christ are truly born again; therefore, infants, very young children, and the mentally deficient cannot be Christians, and cannot be received into the church.

Now truly “the Lord knoweth them that are his” (2 Tim. 2:19), but pastors and elders do not have this perfect knowledge. Man looks on the outward appearance, but only the LORD knows the human heart. The fact is that the elders of the church, examining men and women for membership, do not have perfect, unfailing knowledge of the human heart. When elders examine candidates for membership they look for the fruit of a true faith: evidence of a changed life, a love for God, a desire to obey him, a fear of the Lord, a renunciation of self, a seeking after the glory of God. Our Lord taught that “a tree is known by its fruit.” If a person is born again, then his life will be different. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

But the fact is that church overseers are not omniscient. They do not have perfect knowledge of the human heart. They make mistakes. There are people who are very good actors, who give convincing performances. This happened in New Testament times. There was Simon the sorcerer, who “believed” and was baptized, and for a time continued with Philip. There were Judas Iscariot, Demas, Hymenaeus, Phygelus, and Alexander the coppersmith, who made shipwreck of the faith. Paul asserts that there are “false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.”⁹ There are “false brethren.”¹⁰ Peter confirms that “there *were* false prophets also among the people, even as there *shall be* false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction” (2 Pet. 2:1). It is the same under both the old and new covenant!

So there is always the need for church discipline for flagrant offenders who refuse to repent.¹¹ The Lord would not have instituted church discipline if the church he founded was going to be perfectly pure, 100% of the time—if the men he called to church office would always, without fail, admit only truly born again members of Christ and reject false disciples. But the fact is, that no matter how faithfully the elders do their job, there will always be some bad apples that will fall through the cracks. No church anywhere in the world is 100% pure—none!¹² The anabaptist ideal—no matter how well intended—has never been realized. In the words of the Westminster Confession, “the purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error.”¹³ That is the state of things in a fallen world.

Yes, “the days are coming, says the LORD, when . . . none of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for *all* shall know

⁹ 2 Cor. 11:13

¹⁰ 2 Cor. 11:26, Gal. 2:4

¹¹ Compare 2 Thess. 3:6, “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you *withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly* and not according to the tradition which he received from us.”

¹² Show me a church where the elders can certify that every person they have ever received into communicant membership is born-again. Obviously, that is something only the Holy Spirit could do.

¹³ https://opc.org/wcf.html#Chapter_25 accessed 10-18-25

Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them” (Heb. 8:8, 11)—but we are not there yet.

If the standard were: church elders must infallibly receive only born-again persons into membership, then who could aspire to the office of elder? That is an impossibly high standard. Church elders are not divine. They do not possess perfect, infallible, unerring, foolproof knowledge concerning who is elect and who is not. They cannot guarantee with perfect certainty that any person received into the visible church is born again. If the standard for being a church elder were infallible knowledge of human hearts, then no one could qualify to be an elder. The anabaptist ideal of a pure church consisting of only regenerate members has never been realized, and will never be realized in this life.

Dear saints of God, let us live out our profession. Let us endeavor, with God’s help, to be faithful unto death. Let us never “go out” of Christ’s flock. Amen.