

Antinomianism: The Antidote

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints. For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord... These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen (Jude 3-4,19-25).

I want to speak to you for a few minutes on the book of Jude.

Jude told his readers that he had wanted to write to them about the salvation we share, but, as he came to write, he saw that there was an even more pressing issue about which he should write. Verse 3: he felt that he should write to these believers and urge them to contend for the faith that had been entrusted to all the saints once and for all. The reason, as he says in verse 4, is that certain men – false teachers – had infiltrated the churches, come among the believers. And what they were doing was taking the gospel, the grace of God in the gospel, and they were changing, warping, twisting, distorting that grace of our God into a licence for immorality, and ultimately denying the Lord Jesus Christ, our only sovereign and Lord. They were taking the liberty which believers have in Christ, under the gospel, in the new covenant – the liberty, the freedom from sin, from death, and from law – and they were warping this freedom – distorting it, twisting it into licence for immorality.

Antinomianism: The Antidote

The long word for this is ‘antinomianism’ – *anti*: against; *nomos*: law – lawlessness, if you will; utter lawlessness; do as you want; live as carnally as you please. Another word for it is ‘libertinism’ – a person who teaches like this is ‘a libertine’. A person who practices this is ‘a libertine’: antinomianism, libertinism.

These people take the grace of God, and push it to such an extent, and warp it in such a way, as they teach believers that they can sin as much as they like, they can be as carnal as their flesh desires, and they do not in any way bring upon themselves any consequences! In fact, some will go so far as to say that they would magnify the grace of God the more they sinned.

This, of course, is an appalling doctrine. The practice is utterly evil.

Believers *have* to be holy: ‘Holiness without which no man shall see the Lord’. And that does not speak about justification, there! That speaks about sanctification! Godliness! Christ-likeness! Unless a man is a new creature, and lives as a new creature, he has not passed from death unto life! He is still in the kingdom of darkness!

And Jude sees this problem, this issue, in the churches, and he feels he must write and contend for the gospel – the gospel that has once been given to the saints, entrusted to us by God in his grace.

From verse 5 to verse 19, Jude expands on this, and gives illustrations and examples of it: the Israelites sinning coming out from Egypt, the angels who fell, Sodom and Gomorrah, and so on; Balaam, Korah. And Jude is very clear how evil and corrupting and warping and corroding – corrosive – is this doctrine.

Now, the issue is – he wants to put it right: How can we stop believers sinning? How can we promote godliness amongst believers? What is the motive for it? How will we be spurred, as believers, to live lives that glorify God in Christ?

Antinomianism: The Antidote

Well, historically – it didn't begin with Calvin – but Calvin formulated it more clearly than any – Calvin said that we do this – we promote godliness, we produce sanctification – by the law of Moses, by the law of God, particularly the ten commandments. He described the law as a whip. He described believers as lazy asses, or lazy donkeys or mules. And to make us holy, as lazy asses, as he called us, we need to be whipped with the law.

Calvin's view has dominated the Reformed and evangelical world ever since. And even to this very day, the vast majority of Reformed and evangelical people are convinced that sanctification is by the law: it gives us the standard of sanctification, and it moves us and motivates us, and spurs us to it. Some evangelicals and Reformed are overtly, and definitely, clearly, Calvinistic in this way. But perhaps the majority of evangelicals are unknowingly following Calvin in this way, and, although they, perhaps, wouldn't be as overt as saying the law is the great sanctifier – the great spur and motive for our sanctification – nevertheless they fall into what I can only call 'recipe preaching': do this, do the other, stop doing that, tick the boxes – and, lo and behold, you will be sanctified! Conform to certain rules (often man-made), and you will be sanctified! 'Recipe preaching'! 'List preaching'! And, underneath it all, fear is the motive. The whip makes the lazy donkey cower. The burnt child fears the fire. The lazy ass cowers at the whip. And, for the majority of Reformed and evangelical believers, fundamentally – at the bottom – *fear* is the motive for sanctification.

Let us get back to Jude.

Up to up verse 19, he's been explaining the problem, but, from verse 20 to the end of his book (to verse 25), he gives the solution to antinomianism, the antidote. He starts: '*But* you, dear friends'; '*but* you, dear friends...' You see: he changes gear at verse 20.

All I want to do in these few minutes is ask you just to look at the book of Jude, and see for yourself. How does Jude motivate

Antinomianism: The Antidote

me as a believer? How does he motivate you as a believer to live a godly life for Jesus? How does he protect these believers from these false teachers, these antinomians, these libertines?

Well... it's quite clear to me! Look at verses 20 to 25. Examine these verses for yourself. If you ask Calvin, if you ask the Reformed, if you ask the evangelicals, the majority, fundamentally their answer is this: 'The law! Preach the law to them! Hammer the law! Take them to the law! *That* will prevent them from following the antinomians!'

Now look at Jude. Read verses 20 to 25.

How many times does Jude say 'the law', 'the law'? Well... I cannot see that he uses the words 'the law' once! What he does say, the words he does use are these, words like: 'The Holy Spirit... God's love... the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ... being merciful... show mercy'. *These* are the kinds of words that I see Jude using here. He's not taking them to the law, is he? Where *is* he taking them? He's taking them to grace, not law! He's taking them to the gospel, not to the law. He is taking them, above all, to the Lord Jesus Christ, and not the law.

You see, the answer to antinomianism is *not* the law. The way to produce holiness is *not* to preach the law. It is to preach *Christ*. It is to look to Christ, to consider Christ, to meditate upon Christ, to grow up into Christ, to want Christ, to want to please Christ.

Now this is only one passage, and I haven't time to give all the arguments. I can only suggest that you look through the New Testament. Say, take Romans 12 to the end, and count how many times the apostle talks about 'the law'. He does, in those verses, use the law as a paradigm or an illustration – in one passage – but see how many times in that great passage, where he is speaking about sanctification (Romans 12 to the end) – how many times does he say: 'Christ', 'Christ', 'Christ'? If you wish to see my full arguments, may I suggest you read my books: *Christ Is All* and *Four 'Antinomians' Tried and Vindicated?* But, above all, read the New Testament, and see, mark, how, whenever Paul or Peter or John, or any of the

Antinomianism: The Antidote

apostles, urge upon us sanctification, the motive they use, the spur that they use, is always Christ and the grace of God in Christ. This stands out a mile!

Let me give you one or two examples. Paul tells the Corinthians – tells us – that we should cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh. I'm thinking of 2 Corinthians 7, verses 1 and 2. The passage leads on from chapter 6. Now what is the motive for cleansing ourselves? Is it the law? Well, read it and see! He speaks of the wonderful promises that God has given us in the gospel in Christ. This is the way to be sanctified: through the Lord Jesus Christ!

Take another place: Ephesians 5. We have to forgive other believers. Why should we forgive others? 'Even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven us'.

I already mentioned Romans 12 to 16. But it's right throughout the New Testament: the motive, the spur for sanctification is always Christ and the gospel, the grace of God. It is never the law.

I say to you my friends, in Jude's words: 'But you, dear friends, build yourselves in your most holy faith, and pray in the Holy Spirit'! You need to be protected from antinomians. You need to be stirred to godliness and holiness and spiritual life, if you are a believer. And this is how you do it:

Dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

If you look to the Lord Jesus Christ, if your business is to see others looking to the Lord Jesus Christ, and rescue them from their sins, the antinomians will not gain ground on you. The answer, the antidote, to antinomianism is not the law. The great motive is Christ and the gospel. And, I say, if you continue – and if I with you – if we all continue to grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we shall

Antinomianism: The Antidote

experience what Jude speaks of in his final verses, this great doxology:

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, [and] power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Believer! How were you washed from your sins? How were you justified, and brought to peace with God? It was through our Lord Jesus Christ, was it not? You looked to him. You knew that if you believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, you would be saved. And so you looked, you believed, and you were saved. How will you be sanctified? Continue to look to the Lord Jesus Christ. Grow up into him in all things. Consider him! Set your heart, your mind, your affections on Christ. Christ is all!

Unbeliever – if there's an unbeliever listening to me – you need to be saved. You are a sinner; you're on the road to damnation. The only way to be washed from your sins and put right with God is looking by faith, coming by repentant faith, turning to the Lord Jesus Christ, and believing on him, trusting him. Do so, now!

And believer! Look to Christ! Continue to look to Christ! And you will grow in grace. And you will come to that place where you will have everlasting glory, and be with Jesus for ever more! And until that time, you will continue to experience his work of sanctification by his Spirit within you.