

Antinomianism: Its Preventative

If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says: ‘I know him’, but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did (1 John 1:7 – 2:6).

I would like a few words with you on 1 John and chapter 2 and verse 1; the first letter of John, the second chapter, and the first verse. John, writing to believers, says this: ‘I write this to you so that you will not sin’. ‘I write this to you so that you will not sin’. As I say, he is writing to believers – those who have a living faith in our Lord Jesus Christ – and he is writing, he is concerned, that he should prevent them from sinning; he should do what he can to raise up a barrier against them sinning. In other words, he wants them to be holy; he wants them to be godly; he wants them to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; he wants them to be a spiritual people. Again, in other words, he’s raising a barrier against antinomianism; he’s raising a barrier against licentiousness, carnality, worldliness. He wants these believers to be as spiritual as they can be. Murray M’Cheyne, I believe, used to pray: ‘God make me as holy as a man can be’. ‘My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin’.

Now this is a very important matter. It’s a current debate. If you ask the majority of believers, teachers, the answer they will give

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will be along the lines of: the way you prevent believers from sinning is by teaching them the law, and reminding them, reminding them very strongly, that now that they are justified by faith, they are now under the law of God, the law of Moses – the ten commandments in particular, ‘the moral law’, as they call it – they are under that law for sanctification. This was not started by John Calvin – but he certainly formulated it! But the majority of evangelicals are in this system. They believe that by teaching the law they will make men, believers, holy. It won’t save them. They know that: it won’t justify them. But they know that once a man – or they believe, that once a man is justified, they argue, he is under the law for sanctification.

The interesting thing is, let’s ask the apostle; let’s ask John. After all, this is his expressed and stated aim: ‘My dear children I write this to you so that you will not sin’. He’s on the same page – he, and these other teachers I’m talking about, have the same end and purpose and goal: they want to prevent believers from sinning and they want to make believers as holy as possible. Many modern teachers say: ‘The law!’ Now, what does say John say? ‘These things, I write this...’. ‘*These* things I write to you so that you will not sin’. Now... what things?

Well let’s just go a little before, and a little after. I think that’s fair. What did he say just before? Well, I read things like this:

The blood of Jesus, God’s Son, purifies us from all sin... If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

And if I go just a little after, I see this:

We have one who speaks to the Father in our defence – Jesus Christ, the righteous one. He is the atoning sacrifice [the propitiation], for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

I put it to you that when John says: ‘My dear children, I write this, I write these things to you’, the things he’s talking about are the blood of Christ, the forgiveness of sins through the righteousness and the blood of Jesus Christ, his propitiation, his sacrificial death to atone for the sins of his people, and to take

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the wrath of God for them: that *these* are the things that John writes.

He's not writing, he says, this so that unbelievers will be converted. I mean... certainly these doctrines would be very helpful to put before unbelievers that they might be saved, and converted, and brought to faith, and justification, the blood of Christ, the forgiveness of sins. But he is not writing to unbelievers here. He's writing to believers: 'My dear children... walking in the light'. He's talking *about* believers, and he's talking *to* believers. And yet the very things that he stresses here – he says that these very things – are the ones 'I write so that you will not sin'.

Now is this not staggering? in the light of the contemporary church I mean, the contemporary teachers. 'The law, the law, the law!' What does John stress? 'The blood of Christ, the righteousness of Christ, the sacrifice of Christ, Christ's propitiation'. 'I write *these* things. I *stress* these things. I *preach* these things', he said. 'I *teach* these things to believers'. Why? Because it is *these* things above all: Jesus Christ, *Jesus Christ* preached, the *blood* of Christ preached, the *forgiveness* of sin preached. *That* is the way to sanctify saints.

If anybody quarrels with that, read the full argument in chapter 2 verse 1. 'My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin we have...', and then he goes on to speak of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, this *is* the very doctrine that he puts before us. 'Believer', he said, 'think about the Lord Jesus Christ. Think about his death for you. Think about his blood washing away your sins. Think about the love of God towards you, in giving – not sparing – his Son, but delivering him up for you. Think about the fact that he took the wrath of God for you. Meditate upon Christ. Set your heart upon Christ. And you will grow like him. Look to him, and you will become like him'. And being like Christ is being holy. *This* is what holiness is: Christ likeness.

If you have to plough a furrow in a field, and you want to plough a straight furrow, the secret is this: go to one side of the

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field, the far distant side, and plant a stake there, raise a stake there. Come back to the other side of the field, and start to plough. And keep your eye fixed on that stake! You won't make a perfect line, but if you look down on the ground, or you look around you, you will go all over the place! Fix your eyes upon the stake, and you will plough a straighter furrow. Fix your eyes upon Jesus! Consider him! Set your eyes upon him! 'These things I write to you that you will not sin'.

And it goes even deeper and more wonderful than that!

John says: 'I don't want you to sin, and I'm writing this so that you won't sin. But if you do sin, if you do fall, the blood of Christ still washes you from your sins! He, in his righteousness, presents you perfect, faultless, before the Father, without condemnation!'

I think we have to be honest here. This sounds mad, doesn't it! To tell believers not to sin – but then to tell them that, if they do sin, Christ's blood will take it all away! Surely this will not stop sin! Surely this will be antinomianism! Surely this will not produce holiness! You must preach the law!

And I'm sure that will be the reaction of some who will be listening to me.

Your quarrel, my friend, is not with me. I've not said it. Well... I have, but I am the messenger boy here. I've got a Bible open in front of me, and I'm just declaring to you what John says. Your quarrel is not with me – it is with John, the apostle! Ultimately, your quarrel is with God, the Holy Spirit! For *he* wrote through John!

Now I know your creeds and your Confessions and your theological books will tell you it is the law, the law, the law that will sanctify. But I'm telling you what John said. He says: 'It's thinking about Jesus. Stress these things – I stress these things; I write these things'. When Paul wrote to Titus – you will find it in chapters 2 and 3 – he says it the same thing. He tells Titus to 'stress *these* things – these very same things – to make the saints holy. In fact, it says it throughout the New Testament! The way

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to stop antinomianism? The way to produce holiness? Law? It is Christ!

‘Ah!’ you say: ‘But go on to verse 3: “We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands; and so on”. There you are! You have the law. “The law” there’s the ten commandments. There’s the moral law’.

There’s two things I want to say about that. John has said these things about Christ and his sacrifice all clustered around my text. True, in the slightly wider context, we do have the word ‘commands’, ‘commands’, and so on. Yes! But the first thing I want you to see is this: in the immediate context, the things that are stressed are the blood and sacrifice and righteousness of Christ! There’s no gainsaying it! ‘The commands’ are there, but they come *after* this great truth I have put before you. That’s the first thing I want to say.

But there’s another thing, too! You’re making a very, very big assumption here: ‘commands’, ‘ten commandments’, ‘moral law’. Oh? Where did you get that? It says, in my Bible: ‘We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands’. ‘Him’, ‘his’! These are what we call pronouns. The pronoun is in the place of a noun, and it refers back to the noun that comes immediately before. And let’s go back and see who the ‘him’ and ‘his’ are. Ah! I’ve got it! ‘*He* is the propitiation’, in verse 2. Ah! Who is the ‘he’? Let’s go back to verse 1: ‘Jesus Christ the righteous one’. Now verse 3: ‘*His* commands are...’ *Jesus Christ’s commands!* ‘If a man loves *me* he keeps *my* commands’.

I’m not saying a word against the ten commandments, but I’m telling you that the law that’s in question in verse 3 is the law of *Christ*, the commands of *Christ*. It doesn’t give any weight at all to those theologians and doctors and teachers and preachers and writers who tell us that we have to come under the moral law, as they call it, the ten commandments, the law of Moses, for sanctification. The whole context here is Christ, Christ, Christ: his death and his law. It’s the old text, Colossians 3:11, again and again: ‘Christ is all’!

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Believer, would you be sanctified? Then look to Christ! Gaze upon him! Think about his love for you, his death for you, his blood shed for you! that you are perfect, free from condemnation in the sight of God! And let this melt your heart, and move your soul, and govern your life, so that you yield obedience, loving Christ, and keeping his law.

If there is an unbeliever listening to me: this doctrine is for believers; this teaching is for believers. But there's an application to you! Would you be saved from your sins? And you desperately need salvation, I tell you! There is only one way. If John says to believers: 'My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin... Christ, Christ, Christ', I am more than justified in saying to you: 'Unbelieving friend... if you would be saved: Christ, Christ, Christ, Jesus, Saviour. Take him as your Saviour, Christ, Messiah, the anointed one. Take him as your Messiah, Lord. Take him as your King. Submit to him – the Lord Jesus Christ. Look to him, and you will be saved!'

So, whether you're a believer, or an unbeliever, this text is saying the same thing: 'Behold the Lamb of God!' He takes away sin. He sanctifies the saint. Look to him! Be saved, and sanctified.