

Antinomianism: Hope Is The Answer

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin (1 John 3:1-5).

I would like to speak to you for a few minutes on 1 John chapter 3 and verse 3; 1 John, the third chapter and the third verse: ‘Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure’; ‘everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure’.

Let me explain the words at the moment, the first part: ‘everyone’. Now who is this ‘everyone’ that John is talking to, and talking about? Well, let’s start at verse 1: ‘How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!’ Verse 2: ‘Dear friends, now we are children of God’. ‘Everyone’ in this context, then, in verse 3, ‘everyone’ is all the children of God; in other words, true believers. And if we go over the entire letter, we shall soon find that John means those who have a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: they have turned from their sins; they have trusted Christ; they are washed in his precious blood; they are clothed in his righteousness; they are anointed by the Spirit; they are the children of God; they are justified, washed, cleansed from all their sins; they have the inward working of God’s Spirit; they belong to God; they are adopted; they are the children of God. So John is saying, in verse 3, ‘all true believers’, every man, every woman who has this hope in him.

Now, who is the ‘him’? Clearly, in the context, it is the Lord Jesus Christ; God in Christ.

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If you look at the entire letter, you can see this is what John means: ‘Everyone, every true believer who has this hope in the Lord Jesus Christ purifies himself, even as he is pure, just as he is pure. Just as Christ is, so the believer must purify himself and be like Christ’.

So, John is telling believers their responsibility. He’s reminded them of their privileges, but now he is telling them that their responsibility is: You must purify yourself.

Now we mustn’t get the wrong impression, the wrong end of the stick here. He (John) doesn’t mean that we as believers, that believers have this power in themselves to purify themselves. He is telling us our responsibility as believers. He has explained that the Spirit only, Christ only, the energy of God’s Spirit, can enable us to live to the glory of God. We have an anointing from the Holy One – in the previous chapter, he explains; and so on. But, nevertheless, John is saying quite clearly, that the responsibility of every believer is to purify him or herself, and to live in this present carnal, evil age as Christ would live.

Now I’m talking to whom... I don’t know, do I? I’m just speaking, but you’re listening to me. Are you a believer in our Lord Jesus Christ? Are you trusting him as your Saviour, your Lord, your King? Very well! Then I am speaking to you. John is speaking to you. And this is what he says to you my brother and my sister – and he says it to me. He says you as a believer, you must purify yourself, now in this present evil age, you must live as Christ would live. That is your responsibility. That is your duty. That is the commandment I lay upon you, and put before you. Purify yourself!

I know there are many people who think that they can live what they call as ‘a carnal Christian’. They are grossly mistaken! There *is* a text in 1 Corinthians about that, but Paul is rebuking the Corinthians: he is not allowing them to be carnal! As a believer, my friend, you cannot live as the world lives. You cannot live as a carnal man, or a carnal woman. You have to purify yourself – even as Christ is pure. ‘Be holy for I am holy’,

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says God. Now *that* is the commandment; that is your responsibility.

The truth is, everybody who thinks about this subject is seriously, is really, probably, agreed at this stage. There are those, of course, who think they can live carnally. As I said, they are mistaken!

Now let me turn to the rest of us. We know that we have to live as a godly man, or a godly woman, in this present evil age. Very well! The great question is: What is the standard? And the even greater question is: How can I reach that standard? What is the motive to drive me to that? What is going to give me energy and the will and the desire to live to that standard?

Now this is where believers radically divide! The vast majority of believers, Reformed and evangelical believers – what do they think? Whether they know it, or whether they don't know it, they follow John Calvin. And he taught that it is the law of God – the ten commandments, he restricted it to, the ten commandments – that's the standard! And the ten commandments are the driver. He said the ten commandments, the law, is a whip to whack us, to smite us, because we're lazy – lazy donkeys, he said, and we need whipping to obey the law, and that will make us keep the law, and so we will purify ourselves, and be purified in God's sight. That's what John Calvin said.¹ And that's what the majority of believers think.

¹ I do not mean in his *Commentaries*, but in his *Institutes* – which, as he told us, are to be taken as his definitive work. In his *Commentary*, he said this: The apostle 'now draws this inference, that the desire for holiness should not grow cold in us, because our happiness has not as yet appeared, for that hope is sufficient; and we know that what is hoped for is as yet hid. The meaning then is, that though we have not Christ now present before our eyes, yet if we hope in him, it cannot be but that this hope will excite and stimulate us to follow purity, for it leads us straight to Christ, whom we know to be a perfect pattern of purity'. As you can see, Calvin here contradicted what he said in his *Institutes*. Sadly, it is his *Institutes* which (as he wanted) have dominated Reformed and evangelical theology and practice in this vital area.

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They think that by looking at the standard of the law, trying to keep the law, and be whipped by the law when they transgress – fear, punishment, guilt, keeping rules, keeping regulations – this will enable them to live in this present evil age.

I know the creeds say that. I know the great Confessions say it. I know the pastors and the teachers say it. I know the writers write it. I know the systematic theologies say it. I know! I know!

But I ask you, in these few minutes, look at what John says. ‘John, you tell me!’ ‘I *have* told you!’ He says. Read it again! 1 John 3:3: ‘Everyone who has this hope in Christ purifies himself, just as he is pure’. First the standard: ‘Just as Christ is pure’! Do you want to know the standard of holiness? Do you want to know the standard of godliness to reach? Look at Christ! ‘As *he* is pure’! How would Christ live, here, now? What would Christ say in this situation? What would Christ do? What would Christ think? How would Christ react?

Now how can I find that out? By reading his word: ‘Sanctify them through your truth; your word is truth’! That was how he prayed. ‘All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable’ – and I’ll summarise it – for sanctification. It’s profitable for *salvation*, but it’s profitable for *sanctification*! So we look in the Scriptures, and we’re looking for Christ. And as we see Christ – how he reacted, how he lived, how he spoke – so we must purify ourselves, and by God’s Spirit, keep Christ in our mind. Keep thinking of what he would do, how he would react, and what he would say. That is the standard!

But even more important, even more pressing is: How can I reach that standard? And John tells me that too: ‘Everyone who has *this* hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure’. ‘Has this hope in him’! Now ‘hope’ in the New Testament does not mean ‘cross your fingers and hope for the best!’ It means ‘confident expectation, the certain, sure, guaranteed expectation’. Now *what* guaranteed expectation, what sure thing, have we got in Christ?

Well, I’ll tell you some of the things that John has told us – and some of the things in other scriptures: Jesus’ blood has washed

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from all our sins; Jesus has sent his Spirit into our hearts; he has adopted us to be his children; he has anointed us with the Spirit; he has given us the witness of his Spirit within our spirits that we are the children of God; he has set his love upon us; he guarantees to keep us, and to pray for us without ceasing, and to come again and receive us to himself, and to change us. Indeed, John says here, one day he will come back for us, and he will purify us, and ‘we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is’. We shall see the Lord Jesus again; he will come back for us; he will change us to be like him; and we shall be with him and like him for ever.

‘Everyone who has this hope’ – the forgiveness of their sins, the assurance of everlasting life, and the certainty that one day we shall see and be like *Christ* – ‘everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, even as Jesus is pure’. *There* is the motive! It is Christ, Christ, Christ! It’s what God has done in Christ, what God is doing in Christ, what God will do for us in Christ. Christ living for us now – having come for us, and died for us – living for us now, coming again for us. Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!

Set your mind upon him! Set your affections upon him! This is what John, in effect, is saying. Think about the glories to come! Think about Christ! Think about the standard. But here is the motive! The motive and the standard are one: it is Christ!

I’m not making it up, am I? Be honest! Look at what John says. Read it for yourself! Think about what Calvin and the majority of teachers say: Law! Law! Law! And listen to John: Christ! Christ! Christ! Law? Law? Law? Grace! Grace! Grace! That is what John says! And that is what he means! There’s not an atom of law is there? It’s all of grace!

The answer to antinomianism – which is living carnally – is not law! It is Christ! It is grace! The great means, and the great motive, and the great standard, of sanctification is not law, law, law. It is grace, grace, grace! Above all, it is Christ! There isn’t an atom of law here!

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‘Ah!’ says an objector, ‘you read on... verse 4: “Everyone who sins breaks the law”! In fact, sin is lawlessness. You see, there’s the law!’

I quite agree, my friend. I quite agree. But does it say that the law is my standard? Does it say the law is my spur? No? It doesn’t say anything of the sort! And look what it does go on to say, verse 5: ‘But you know that he appeared’ – Christ again! – ‘so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. And no one who lives in him keeps on sinning’. You see, immediately, I mean, I agree with you, John has mentioned the law here. Sin is lawlessness, yes, lawlessness is sin. I quite agree! But the motive and the means and the spur of our sanctification is all of Christ, is it not? The context says it. John says it bluntly, plainly: ‘Everyone’ – without exception – ‘who has this hope in *Christ* purifies himself, just as he is pure’.

Calvin is wrong! The Confessions are wrong on this point! The systematic theologies are wrong on this point! The ‘great men’ are wrong! The pastors and teachers are wrong. John is telling us! It is Christ! Christ! Christ!

And if there is an unbeliever listening to me, if you’ve got this far: you need salvation! And, you know, it’s the same answer for you, needing *salvation*, as it is for the believer needing *sanctification*! To be saved, go to Jesus: ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved’. Leave aside your rites and ceremonies, works, pastors, priests, churches, and all – go to Christ, trust Christ!

But I come back to the main point: What is the answer to antinomianism? What is the great motive, means and standard of sanctification? ‘Everyone’ – who is a Christian, a believer, man and woman, everyone of us – you my friend, and I myself – I’m speaking to you now: We must purify ourselves. What is the standard? It is Jesus. And what is the means and motive stirring us for this, and the stirring driver for this? It is Christ! Think upon Christ! Look to Christ! And may Christ get all the glory from our poor feeble lives.