

## *Antinomianism: Peter's Answer To It*

I would like to speak to you for a few minutes on 1 Peter, chapter 4, and verses 1 to 5; 1 Peter, chapter 4, verses 1 to 5:

*Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead (1 Pet. 4:1-5).*

I want to have a few words with you on this subject of antinomianism. Do you know what antinomianism is? Do you know how to recognise it? You may have heard about it, and you may have heard it is 'a bad thing'. I say again: Do you know what it is? And how will you recognise it?

Let me say straightaway, like Peter, writing here, I am speaking, in the first instance, to those of you who are believers. Peter says in verse 3: 'You used to be pagans; this is what you used to do; you were a pagan'. Obviously, they've been converted, and they're now believers. So, in the first instance, I'm speaking to those of you who have a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you know him as your Saviour and Lord.

Now then, I want to talk to about antinomianism.

Well, there are two things I want to say about it. First of all, we should think about the theory behind it – the principles underlying the doctrine, if you like, of antinomianism, the theory. And then there is the practice, the outworking, the practical effects, the consequences, the visible signs of antinomianism.

Now, the cause, the basis, the doctrine of antinomianism, comes from these two Greek words: *anti* and *nomos* – 'against law'.

*Antinomianism: Peter's Answer To It*

And, literally, an antinomian is one who will not have any law to govern him. If you like, he is a law unto himself. He is lawless, and he wants to live the way he wants, and nobody and nothing is going to impose any rule on him! He is going to live as he wants! His 'rule', if you like, is: 'I do as I please!' Anti-law!

It is the consequences that most people are concerned with. The consequences, I think, can be easily described, simply described, in our passage, in verse 3. This is what Peter says: Pagans! Living as pagans, such as this: 'debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, detestable idolatry'; or, as he goes on, 'flood of dissipation'. I think that fairly sums it up. The antinomianism we are talking about is living as a pagan: I see it, I want it, I have it – pleasure, sex, power, money, self, living for this life – let us eat and drink and be merry! Living as I want to do! Living as pleases me! Living for the body! Living for the here and now!

Peter says: 'This is how you used to live!' Paul, writing to the Corinthians, says: 'This is how you used to live!' Writing to the Romans, he describes – in the first chapters – how the pagans live: in all manner of evil and wickedness and sin, living for self, all sexual perversions, entertainment, all sorts of gods and practices, and experiences which they have to gratify themselves, here and now.

Most believers are convinced from Scripture, and by experience, and by inward testimony, that to live like that – as a believer – is quite wrong, sinful. There may be some – there have been in the past, and there may be some now – who think that marks like this – drunkenness, orgies, carousing, paganism – is a mark of the highest grace. I can say what I think about that very simply: it's abominable! If you are like that, my friend – anybody who's listening to me – then my text for you is in Hebrews 12 and verse 14: 'Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord!' And don't hide away from that text by saying: Oh! that means justification: that's how God sees me! The writer of Hebrews – in Hebrews 12 – you read it for yourself – you will see – is talking about practical holiness, practical godliness. And if you

*Antinomianism: Peter's Answer To It*

live like pagans, you are a pagan, and you're not a believer! Have I said it plain enough?

But my concern is not mainly with that class of person. There are very few of those, I hope. But the vast majority of believers, the overwhelming majority of believers – we know, don't we, that we must not live as the pagans do. The great issue is – we're persuaded of *that* – the great issue is: How can I live as a Christian should live? What is the Christian life? And how can I produce it?

What is the Christian life? The opposite of these things! I think I can sum it up quite simply: it is that they would live as Jesus would live! God – Romans 8 – has chosen us, and called us and brought us to Christ, that he might bring us increasingly into conformity to Christ. And one day – 1 John 3 tells us – we shall see him, and we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is, and we shall be like him forever. God's intention is to make us Christ-like. So the life I must live now is summed up like this: How would Jesus live here? What would he say? What would he think? What would he do? Where would he go? Let me be like Christ!

Now I don't think there's any issue, really, with this. I think we're all on the same page here. The great question is, as I say: How can we get there?

Most teachers and preachers, most church leaders, and writers on these subjects, have one recipe for it. And it virtually is a recipe! 'You live according to these rules! I'm going to give you some rules, and I'm going to set these rules before you. You keep these rules and regulations in your mind! And you keep them, and you will live the life that pleases God!' They usually argue for the ten commandments – in theory – but they usually add a host of other rules – man-made rules – which they impose upon you. And you do it for yourself, as well! You do it by rule and by rote: You must not do this! You must do the other! You must be regular in this habit! You must avoid that! And this kind of approach.

*Antinomianism: Peter's Answer To It*

Does it work? Yes! That's what most people would say. Many pastors would say they can look out on their congregation, and they can see those who are doing the right thing, and are living this life: they're wearing the right clothes; they're in the right place; they've got the right family-life, the right home-life. They seem to be doing it! It all seems to be right! They (the pastors) can recognise it.

Or so they think!

But they're dreadfully wrong! Because all they're doing is looking at the outward appearance! As we know, man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. And what God wants from me is not simply outward conformity to certain rules. He wants an inward, heart experience: 'My son! Give me your heart!' Man looks on the outward appearance: God looks on the heart! How can I get *heart* Christ-likeness?

You see, the trouble with the rule-and-conformity method is it tries to work into the heart from the outside. But the risk is it produces a load of legal, cardboard cut-outs, look-alikes: conformists to the rules that are laid before the people.

If you're doing it, my friend, how do you find it? It's a struggle, isn't it? For *fear* is at the bottom! You know that! You *fear* to do this! You *fear* to do that! You're afraid when you do! You feel guilty for doing these things! And the pressure upon you for these rules and regulations... and you find it a struggle, don't you? And you know, although you're outwardly conforming, you feel often that you are dry and arid, and, maybe, even resentful, inside.

You know the story of the boy, the little boy, who was taken to the meeting with his father, and at one place they had to stand in the meeting. And the boy didn't want to stand, and the father insisted that his boy should stand. And, of course, he did stand. But this is what the boy said: 'I'm standing outside; but I'm still sitting inside!'

And you know the trouble with law? In my country, we have speeding limits. They're supposed to be the maximum. Most

*Antinomianism: Peter's Answer To It*

people treat them as the minimum. I know from experience that when our Chancellor of the Exchequer produces a budget, and gives the regime for the income tax for the coming year, accountants are sitting up all night preparing reports for their clients to tell them how they should best manage their financial affairs in the coming year to minimise their taxes. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with it. All I'm saying to you, instinctively, when a law is passed, the instinct is: How can I get round it?

Try this experiment. Put a child in a room, and say: 'You can open every cupboard *but* that one there; every drawer but that one there!' Go out of the room. What will happen? You know what will happen: the child will open the drawer!

The law does not produce grace! The law does not produce Christ-likeness! Rules and regulations do not work!

I'm not talking to you about my opinion! Look at what Peter says: 'I want you', he says, 'you must not live as pagans do!' Now let's just see! Find the word 'law' in this passage! I can't see it! He gives me commandments, I'm not saying that he doesn't, that's not what I'm saying. But the commandments are what I can't do! What's his motive? What's his argument? That's what I want! 'Peter! Tell me the reasoning behind this approach to Christ-likeness! How can I reach it?'

Well, he gives me the argument. Let me read it to you: 'Therefore (verse 1), since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires'; and so on. Can you see: if you get verse 1 right – then verse 2, as a result, you will not live in this pagan way; you will live as Christ.

And what is his argument? Keep these rules! I'll smite you if you don't keep these rules! The law is iron. Calvin called it 'a whip'! Is that what Peter says? No! What does he say?

Notice he talks of Christ! There's a *big* difference! We should be *gospel* preachers; those of us who preach – we should be

## *Antinomianism: Peter's Answer To It*

*gospel* preachers, not *legal* preachers! We shouldn't be preaching law; we should preach Christ! That is what Peter did here: 'Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude'. He's after their minds, their thinking. He's not after their conformity. He doesn't aim for conformity. He aims for their thinking. And he knows that once he's got their thinking right, this will come into their heart, and once it has come to their heart, then it will come into their lives. Romans 6:17 says this: the mind, and then the heart, and the will, and the life.

What is his argument? Christ suffered in his body. Arm yourselves also with the same attitude. Think of Christ's suffering in his body! 'Because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin'.

What does 'suffered in his body – done with sin' mean? Well, you suffer in your body, when you get the 'flu; you suffer in your body, when you're cold; you suffer in the body, when you get tired; you suffer in the body, when you're poor; you suffer in the body, when you're hungry; you suffer in the body, when you get cancer. Does it mean when people get cancer, and they're hungry, and they're cold, they don't sin? As a result, he does not live the rest of his life for sins? Because he has suffered in his body, he is done with sin?

Of course not! When Peter says 'suffered in his body', here, he clearly means 'dead', 'has died'. You can offer all the temptations you like to a corpse, you can make it as attractive as you like to a corpse, and you will never get a corpse to sin! Why? Because the corpse is dead! 'Therefore, since Christ died, arm yourselves with the same attitude, because he who has died is done with sin. As a result, he does not live the rest of his life for the pagan's way as he used to'.

So, what is Peter's way of answering antinomianism?

Look to Christ! Set your mind upon Christ! Particularly his death, particularly his blood shed on the cross. Why? Well, think of him, as your Saviour – dying for you, my friend. I'm speaking to you as a believer: think of him, dying for you,

*Antinomianism: Peter's Answer To It*

shedding his blood. And as you think upon him – when the temptations come, the thought of Christ dying for you will guard you, arm you in your mind – that's Peter's words – arm you, help you to think right. Arm yourselves with the same attitude! Did Christ die for me? How can I sin against him? He loved me: how can I sin against this love?

But it is more than that. It's more than Christ died for me.

Romans 6! And I think 1 Peter 4 is a parallel passage to Romans 6. When Christ died, we who are believers were united to him, so when he died, we died; when he was buried, we were buried; when he rose, we rose. We died with Christ, and in Christ!

So arm yourselves with this mind! Christ died on the cross: I died with him! I am crucified with him! All his benefits, all his works and merits are mine! He died to give them to me. I am in him! How can I sin?

It's not only: How can I sin! The thought the more I concentrate upon Christ, the less sin will be attractive to me. I shall be armed in my attitude, in my mind, by dwelling on the fact that I died with Christ, how can I sin! Why should I sin! Why will I sin! I'd rather live for Jesus – he who lived and died for me!

Law? If you read on in Romans 6, and into Romans 7, you will get the same teaching as you get here, more fully explained. And what is that? The law will not sanctify you, my friend! In fact, Romans 7 says this – and Romans 6, as a matter of fact – you have to be dead to the law to be alive to God – to be able to live a sanctified life! Rules will not sanctify you! It is Christ, his blood and righteousness, his death for you, and you in him! He is in you, and you are in him!

So, would you be free from antinomianism! Then think of Christ! Set your heart and your mind upon Christ! Think of him dying *for* you, and *living* for you! Think of him dying in your place, and coming again for you! And think of the fact that you *died* in him to sin, to law and to death, and you're alive in him, and seated with him now in everlasting glory. And I assure you – not me assuring you, really – it's Peter! 'As a result', he says

*Antinomianism: Peter's Answer To It*

(verse 2), 'this will enable you, as a result, if you arm yourselves in your thinking – with this mind – you will not live the rest of your earthly life for evil human desires'!

Am I speaking to an unbeliever? Is there an unbeliever listening to me? You are yet in these detestable things! This is your life! To escape from it, my friend, there is only one way: look to Christ! His blood must wash you from your sins! His righteousness must clothe you! Come to Christ! 'Lord give me this righteousness! Lord wash my sins away in your blood. Forgive me my sins, receive me now, take me to the Father, make me accepted in yourself!' *And he will!* And then you, too, will be in the same position as the rest of the people I've addressed in this small talk.

We are believers! Now let us look to Jesus! Let us arm ourselves with this attitude! Let us think upon Christ dying for us, and us dying in him! And the more we think upon him, and look to him, the less attractive will the world become, and the more we shall live to the glory of his name! Indeed, as he goes on to say, Peter, in verse 11: 'All things' – 'in all things, God maybe praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen'.

Start by thinking upon Christ, looking to Christ – not trying; not looking to law, but looking to Christ! – and you will end up living to the praise of Jesus Christ: To him be the glory and power – in praise of God for ever and ever. Amen!