

Antinomianism: The Ultimate Cure

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your flesh: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:1-17)

I'd like a few minutes with you, if I may, speaking on Colossians chapter 3, and verses 1 to 17. Colossians 3:1-17.

I have called this small address: 'Antinomianism: The Ultimate Cure'. 'Antinomianism: The Ultimate Cure'.

Some of you may have been wondering, as you've heard this word 'antinomianism', you may have wondered what it really is. What is this 'antinomianism'? How does it show itself?

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Well, I think the apostle, here – Paul – gives us, in a few words, a very full, clear description of the kind of lifestyle, the kind of habit, the kind of attitude, the kind of mindset, the kind of way of living, that you can find in an antinomian. I'm thinking of verse 5. Now, the apostle here is telling believers what they must *not* do; what must *not* be in their life. But, the things he's describing here are in fact the things that belong to this thing called 'antinomianism'. 'Whatever belongs to your members on earth: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry'.

Have look at that for a moment. I say to you that describes the kind of behaviour, the kind of lifestyle you would find in an antinomian man, or an antinomian woman: living for this life, living for earthly pleasures, living as the worldly man, the worldly woman, lives; living for sexual immorality, indulgence of every kind, lusting, greed; and so on, and so on. I think you can see here very clearly the kind of lifestyle, the kind of approach to life that the antinomian will reveal: he is, she is, carnal – acting as an unbeliever, acting as a pagan.

Now I know some misapply that text in Corinthians about... when.. Paul writes to the Corinthians there: 'You are carnal, and so on', and they think that Paul is giving the description of a perfectly acceptable kind of Christian life. If you are one with such an opinion, my friend, you're completely mistaken! Paul is not describing that which is acceptable! As here, he is describing something which is abominable! You want to know my opinion about this kind of lifestyle, in a professing believer? It comes from hell! It's Satanic! It's diabolical! It's utterly wrong! It's sinful! It's wicked! It's evil! Have I been clear enough?

This kind of lifestyle is not only *disappointing* in a believer: it is utterly unacceptable! In fact, if a man or a woman lives like this, they may profess all they will about being Christian, about being a believer, but their life contradicts their profession. 'If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away. Behold, all things are become new!' Paul says, in verse 7: 'You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived'. This is

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how you once lived. You were pagans! But now you're converted, you *do* not live like this! You *cannot* live like this! You *must* not live like this!

I hope I've made myself clear!

What does Paul want? He wants the very opposite of these things. He wants us to cultivate the very opposite of these things. And he gives us many do's and many do-not's. There are commands in the gospel. Believers are commanded. The Bible is full of these commands. The New Testament is full of these commands to believers.

But this is not the point I am after here. I think we're all agreed at this point – well, I hope we are, anyway! If you are a believer, then my friend, you recognise that you must live a life that conforms to Christ, and not to the world. You must live a life in obedience to God's word, not a life that conforms to the standards of this present age. I'm sure – well, I hope, anyway – I can take it for granted, that that is a given among us.

The great issue is this, the great question... is: How can I reach this standard? How can I attain to this? What will motivate me to it? What will move me to it? What will give me energy and power to do it? What is the way that will enable me to reach this glorious position where I don't live like pagans do, I live like believers do – I don't live like the world; I live like Christ?

You see, it goes deeper than what I've said. If you look at verse 8, you will find that Paul goes down deeper and more inward: anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language, lying; and all this kind of thing. How can I reach this standard – where I don't live like this, I don't think like this, I don't act like this, I don't speak like this, I don't spend my time like this?

This where the Christian world divides sharply into two. The majority of evangelical and Reformed believers, following the teaching of John Calvin – whether they know it or whether they don't – think that the best way, the right way, to produce this spirituality is to give believers the law of Moses – particularly the ten commandments, which they call 'the moral law'. Now

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some teachers are overt about this, and most definite in their writings and in their teachings. The Confessions say it – and I mean by that the Westminster Confession, the 1689 Baptist Confession (Particular Baptist Confession) – these sorts of Confessions. And these teachers, the great systematic theology’s, the great teachers in the churches, are, by and large, are men of the law.

Calvin – who, as I say, was the principal architect of this system, whether men know it or not – likened the law to a whip; and we, as believers, he likened to lazy mules, lazy donkeys, lazy asses – and as a lazy ass won’t move unless you clout him a whip, so the believer needs to be whipped with the law. I’m using Calvin’s picture. If you don’t believe me, read his writings! If you want to read extracts from his works, you can see my own book *Christ Is All*, where you will see it fully set out and documented. This is what he said. And many of his followers have said very similar things: We must hold the law before our eyes! We must preach the law, teach the law! And that will make us a sanctified, godly people!¹ As I say, some are overtly like this; but many – the vast majority of – teachers are much more incipient, much more subdued. It’s there – at a lower level – but it’s there all the same.

I want to be useful. I want to be as clear as I can, and as helpful as I can to you. Let me describe a sermon that I’ve heard recently. It was a sermon about 40 minutes long, and it was based – and it came from – the book of Daniel. And I think I’m – well, I know I am – I’m distilling fairly what this man said. He wanted us to be a spiritual people. I’m sure of that! And this is what he said: We must read our Bible regularly, and we must say our prayers regularly. He used the words ‘quiet time’. We must ‘ring fence our quiet time’. We must be regular in our prayers, and regular in our Scripture reading. Three times a day should we pray. And for 40 minutes – well, for 38 minutes, I should say – of this discourse, *that* was what he was stressing,

¹ In this present volume, see the first chapter for several extracts from Calvin and others.

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and labouring, and making clear to us: You keep up your Bible reading, you keep up your prayers. And the implication is, that, as you keep up your Bible reading, and keep up your prayers, you will grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ.

I don't know what planet that man's living on! Let me say at once: I have nothing to say against Bible reading, nothing to say against saying prayers! Do I need to say that? I have everything to say *for* Bible reading, and everything to say *for* saying my prayers! I have nothing to say against ring-fencing times when we might give ourselves to God! Nothing must interrupt us in our coming to God, and worship, and hearing from him in his word, and saying prayers, and praying to him! I don't know if I am making myself clear. I'm going to be misunderstood, I'm sure! People will think I'm speaking against saying prayers and reading the Bible! Not at all!

But I will say this, my friend: 'You can keep your 'quiet time' as regular as clockwork – *but it won't make you, in itself, it won't make you a spiritual man!* The truth is, you can be on your knees – and have impure thoughts! You can be reading your Bible – and your mind be full of worldliness! You can be in a pulpit doing it! You can be doing any of these exercises, carrying out any of these exercises, in a very strict and a very disciplined way, and yet you can still be guilty of these things: impurity, lust, evil desires, rage, anger, malice, slander, filthy language – and all that kind of stuff – in your heart and mind!

I'm saying to you: You can preach conformity to people, make them obey rules and keep to regulations, and it may look as though they're spiritual. *But it doesn't necessarily follow that they are!* They may be wearing the right colour suit, they may be carrying the right version of the Bible, the right hymnbook, they may be regular in attendance, but it does not necessarily follow that you are a spiritual person.

I know of a person who went to her pastor – I'm not saying that she should do this – but she went to her pastor, and she thought, she said, she was backsliding. And the pastor said: 'Well, you can't be', he said, 'because you're coming to the meetings'!

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You see what was in his mind: Because you are attending meetings, that makes you spiritual. I don't know what planet that man was living on! You can be completely carnal, sitting in a pew, with a Bible opened. You can be carnal in a pulpit, preaching!

Conformity to rules will not make me spiritual. But I put it to you that the majority of teachers in the Christian world teach, in one form or another, sanctification, godliness, by rules and regulation, the law of God!

I'm not saying a word against the law of God. It's part of Scripture! I'm not saying a word against Bible reading, or prayers, or chapel attendance, or hearing the gospel. I'm not saying a word... I'm say a lot for it, all for it! And there are commandments here! But what does Paul tell me here is the motive, and the great stirrer, and the great energizer, and the great means, whereby I shall attain to this standard?

Well I only have to read it to you. I have only a short time, and therefore I'll just read it to you. But let me read it to you – verse 1:

Since, then, you have been raised with the Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Can you see the difference, my friend?

Make sure you say your regular prayers! Make sure you read your Bible! I'm not saying a word against it – but is *that* going to make me holy?

Set your mind upon Christ! Set your heart upon Christ – his coming again for you! He died for you! He loves you with an everlasting love! He prays for you now! He's interceding for you! Think upon Christ! Think upon Christ! Think upon the glory to come!

Or how about verse 12: 'As God's chosen people' – think of your election – 'holy and dearly loved' – God has loved you

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with an everlasting love! He has separated you from the world! – ‘clothe yourselves with compassion’ – and all the rest of it – ‘kindness, humility, bear with each other’! Why? ‘Forgive each other’! Why? ‘Forgive as the Lord forgave you’! ‘Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts! Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach one another, admonish one another, with all wisdom’ – and so on – ‘singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him’!

Once again, I don’t know whether I’m making myself clear to you! But to me, there’s a world of difference between conforming to regular patterns of quiet times, keeping rules and regulations, and setting my mind upon Christ, my heart upon him, thinking what he’s done for me, what he’s doing for me now, what he will do for me – in the years to come, what he will do for me in eternity – what he has done in me – thinking upon Christ! Is there anything here about rules and regulations?

Well, there is! In verse 20, in the previous chapter! Let me read it to you:

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch! these are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings.

If you may say: ‘Well, the ten commandments are not human commands and regulations and teachings’, I quite agree! But the same principle will apply: you can have all the codes you like even the highest and the best, the noblest, code – ‘such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence’. You’ve only got to look at the Jewish nation. They had the law – *but did it make them a godly people?* The law? Did it make them godly? It did not!

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Rules and regulations will not make me conform to Christ. It's got to come from within, working out – not from without, trying to work in.

And this is 'the ultimate', I say. Why? Because I deliberately missed out the *great* text! And it is the central text! And its verse 11: 'Christ!' (chapter 3, Colossians 3, and verse 11): 'Christ is all, and is in all'.

I hope I've made it clear: the difference between one method – rule, regulation, conform! Christ! Christ is! Christ is all, and in all! Look to Christ! 'Looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith'. 'Consider him!' 'Set your minds and your hearts upon him!' 'Look full into his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace'.

How can I do this, and sin against the Lord! It is Christ, I'm sinning against! How can I offend God who loved me so much! I am the temple of the Holy Spirit! God the Spirit's in me: How can I do these things! How can I say these things! I can't go to these places! Why not? Because I'm a Christian! I'm in Christ, and Christ is in me! And I'm looking to Jesus, the author and the finisher of my faith! He is all!

I'm addressing you now, my friend, and you are either a believer or an unbeliever.

If you are a believer, you must not conform to this world, you have this command. How should you turn away from this world, and be conformed to Christ? Looking to Christ, trusting Christ! Yes, read your Bible; of course, you must! Say your prayers, yes. But don't you realise that even in all these rules and regulations, what you must do above all is set your mind and your heart and your affections upon the Lord Jesus! Think of him! Speak of him! Sing of him! Dwell upon him! And you will grow like him! And one day, you will be transformed completely, in glory, to be with him forever, and like him forever.

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Unbeliever: we once, too, all of us who are believers, were once just like you – far off from God. How can you be saved from your sins? If you go to Islam, that will not save you! If you go to Buddhism, that won't save you! If you go to baptism, the Lord's table, church attendance, Bible reading, prayers – all those sorts of things – you can do what you will, my friend: it won't save you! You must look unto Jesus! You must trust him!

So, it's the same word – it's the *ultimate* for us all. If I'm a sinner, to be saved, I must look to Jesus, and I shall be saved. So, is there an unbeliever listening to me? Look to Jesus, now, and he will save you.

And then I say, finally, to all believers: 'Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above'! Set your hearts upon Christ! 'Christ is all, and in all'! And as you look to him, and dwell upon him, you will be more and more conformed to him.

And all will be as it says in verse 17: 'Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him'.