

“A Graceful Answer to the Antinomian Argument!”

The message of salvation by grace means freedom for the enslaved soul, but can be very threatening to the religiously bound or binding persons! There has been a conflict between works and grace since the fall of man and it is no surprise that it continues today. We will look at the historic roots of this accusation against the gospel and see how wonderfully the message of grace responds!

1. What is antinomianism? I often hear this word launched accusatively at the doctrine of free grace!

a. Antinomianism: etymology-

From the Greek *ἀντί*, "against" + *νόμος*, "law"; or *lawlessness* (in the Greek Bible: ἀνομία,^[1] "unlawful"), in theology, is the idea that members of a particular religious group are under no obligation to obey the laws of ethics or morality, and that salvation is by faith only.^[2] Antinomianism is the polar opposite of legalism, the notion that obedience to a code of religious law is necessary for salvation¹.

b. Antinomian: Merriam-Webster Dictionary

1] One who holds that under the gospel dispensation of grace the moral law is of no use or obligation because faith alone is necessary to salvation.

2] One who rejects a socially established morality²

3] False assumption: Many people who hold to the Gospel of Grace may still believe there is a use for the moral law derived from the Bible. But keeping any law, from the law of man to the Ten Commandments, does not produce God's righteousness. It did not produce God's righteousness in Israel, nor could it for the Gentiles. Only Christ kept the Law and for those who could not, Christ died to the Law!

4] False assumption: Many who hold to the free grace position live to a higher standard, The Law of Life in Christ! With the presence of the indwelling Spirit of God, the old man is to die and the new man can rule. In this life there is real power to live a life that far surpasses the morality established by a society!

COL 2:23 These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, {but are} **of no value against fleshly indulgence.³**

5] For some, it has been an accepted label born by those who reject the teaching of legalism, church traditional authority, or Calvinistic assurance through sanctification.

a] The Great American Antinomian Controversy 1636-1638

b] John Cotton; John Eaton, Tobias Crisp; Henry Denne⁴

c. Antinomianism: is an offensive doctrinal position from the official Catholic view!

¹ <http://www.bartleby.com/61/39/A0343900.html>

² <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/antinomian>

³ "All Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960,1962,1963,1968,1971,1972,1973,1975,1977,1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission."

⁴ Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649; Dr. R.T. Kendall; Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford pages 185-189

1] “The heretical doctrine that Christians are exempt from the obligations of moral law.”⁵

2] The term first came into use at the Protestant Reformation, when it was employed by **Martin Luther to designate the teachings of Johannes Agricola and his sectaries**, who, pushing a mistaken and perverted interpretation of the Reformer's doctrine of justification by faith alone to a far-reaching but logical conclusion, asserted that, as good works do not promote salvation, so neither do evil works hinder it; and, as all Christians are necessarily sanctified by their very vocation and profession, so as justified Christians, they are incapable of losing their spiritual holiness, justification, and final salvation by any act of disobedience to, or even by any direct violation of the law of God⁶

3] A theory — for it was not, and is not necessarily, anything more than a purely theoretical doctrine, and **many professors of Antinomianism, as a matter of fact, led, and lead, lives quite as moral as those of their opponents** — was not only a more or less natural outgrowth from the **distinctively Protestant principle of justification by faith, [see Trent: Heresy; at end of notes]** but probably also the result of an erroneous view taken with regard to the relation between the Jewish and Christian dispensations and the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Doubtless a confused understanding of the Mosaic ceremonial precepts and the fundamental moral law embodied in the Mosaic code was to no small extent operative in allowing the conception of true Christian liberty to grow beyond all reasonable bounds, and to take the form of a theoretical doctrine of **unlimited licentiousness**⁷.

4] **Opposed to Catholic doctrine on justification:** The qualities of justification “We have seen that Protestants claim the following three qualities for justification: **certainty, equality, the impossibility of ever losing it.** Diametrically opposed to these qualities are those defended by the Council of Trent (sess. VI, cap. 9-11): **uncertainty (incertitudo), inequality (inaequalitas), amissibility (ammissibilitas).** Since these qualities of justification are also qualities of sanctifying grace, see GRACE”.⁸

2. How is the charge of “antinomianism” a threat to Gospel of Grace?

a. When it is used as an attack against the Grace of the Gospel.

[Curriculums, radio teachers, etc.]

b. When it is used as an indicting expression to generalize and vilify Gospel preachers!

1] **Example:** The historic **Assembly of Divines** convened for the first time on 1 July 1663 meeting; 69 were in attendance. On July 19 1643 they sent a petition to Parliament to deal with the growing movement of Anabaptists and the “Antinomians most.” **Only one of the ‘Antinomians’ was invited to participate at the Westminster Assembly, John Cotton.**⁹

2] Similar arguments and aspersions are cast in modern religious circles:

In the article “Confused with Antinomianism”-

“First, the Free Grace position is confused with antinomianism. **MacArthur suggests that the mainstream of the Free Grace Movement views the obedient Christian life as “optional” (p. 17) and that the behavior of individuals has “no**

⁵ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01564b.htm>

⁶ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01564b.htm>

⁷ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01564b.htm>

⁸ Copyright © 2009 by **Kevin Knight**. Dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08573a.htm>

⁹ Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649; Dr. R.T. Kendall; Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford; pages 167, 168

relationship to their spiritual status" (p.16). By quoting men like Lewis Sperry Chafer, Charles Ryrie, and Zane Hodges, in the context of such comments, it is implied that these men (as well as the view they represent) are only concerned with populating heaven, showing a disdain for holiness and a consistent Christian walk."¹

Yet even a cursory glance at the writings of these men reveals a deep love for Jesus Christ and a desire both to live and teach the importance of a holy lifestyle. They, as well as the mainstream of the Free Grace Movement, are anything but antinomian in theology! However, what they are *not* willing to concede is that commitment to holiness provides either grounds for, or indispensable proof of, justification.¹⁰

3] Here is the irony: Protestants as a group, including MacArthur, are labeled 'Antinomian' by Romanists because of their doctrine of justification by faith alone! They believe, as was quoted earlier, that justification in the fullest sense is not by faith alone. Sanctification as a process must also be a part of the work of justification.

c. When it was used as a blasphemous accusation against past Gospel preachers!

1] Stephen

ACT 6:8 And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. ACT 6:9 But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen, {including} both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and argued with Stephen.

ACT 6:10 And {yet} they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. ACT 6:11 Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and {against} God." ACT 6:12 And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and dragged him away, and brought him before the Council. ACT 6:13 And they put forward false witnesses who said, "**This man incessantly speaks against this holy place, and the Law;** ACT 6:14 for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us."

2] Paul

ACT 13:³⁸Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: ³⁹And by him all that believe are justified from all things, **from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.**

ACT 21:28 crying out, "Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who **preaches to all men everywhere against our people, and the Law**, and this place; and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place."

3. What is the rationale often employed in accusing people of antinomianism?

Aside from theological reasons, the following four are often used:

a. Straw man fallacy: create an opponent with minimal weakness and then tear him up!

1] Definition: One way of making our own arguments stronger is to anticipate and respond in advance to the arguments that an opponent might make. In the straw

¹⁰ <http://www.faithalone.org/journal/1989i/Butcher.html>

man fallacy, the arguer sets up a wimpy version of the opponent's position and tries to score points by knocking it down. But just as being able to knock down a straw man, or a scarecrow, isn't very impressive, defeating a watered-down version of your opponents' argument isn't very impressive either. ¹¹

2] Manufacture an extreme example- i.e., of a licentious believer flaunting their assurance of salvation while living in decadence- "see, this is typical of those antinomians! This is the end result of a false Gospel!"
Then this poor 'character' will be torn to pieces by the wit of the executioner!

3] What about the case of the Corinthian saint, living in sin the Gentiles abhorred?

b. False dichotomy: makes it appear there are only two choices- with yours being the best!

1] Definition: In false dichotomy, the arguer sets up the situation so it looks like there are only two choices. The arguer then eliminates one of the choices, so it seems that we are left with only one option: the one the arguer wanted us to pick in the first place. But often there are really many different options, not just two—and if we thought about them all, we might not be so quick to pick the one the arguer recommends! ¹²

2] The only alternative to the heretical antinomian position is the rational legalism I am presenting! What other positions are possible?

c. Appeal to authority- uses the names of well known people to fortify your position!

1] Especially in theological issues, appeal to popular authorities bolsters your position. But even big named people can be wrong on important topics and their opinion is no better than another on some issues! Peter the Apostle led believers into hypocrisy and had to be rebuked openly for it!

2] This one is used so much it must be effective! Quoting other famous theologians is as common as breathing in popular books today. Since 'So and So' wrote in thus book, I must support his position! So my position is the same and it must be true!

d. Vilification- to tear down the esteem of your foe makes him evil in another's eyes!

1] Once the foe is named, the attack begins. At the end, the implication is that only a fool would side with such a person. But what has this tactic actually proved?

2] Even a bad person might be right on something! What is the authority by which the truth needs to be measured? In our case it should be comparing scripture with scripture!

5. What saves a person's soul? [Human nature and fig leaves!]

a. Are people saved through 'Pro-nomianism'- or "for the Law", or the keeping of law?

1] Though this is outright denied by most theologians and Catholic writings, yet, the faith they elude to will be one that the adherent must show evidence of a moral law working out of their experience in faith. Justification is either aided by or essential to works of faith. Sanctification is a necessary proof of faith.

¹¹ <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/fallacies.html>

¹² <http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/fallacies.html>

2] What part does sanctification play in salvation? Is assurance based on present proofs of separation in a life and the perseverance in it? Or is assurance based on the promise of God and faith alone?

b. Biblically, the purpose of the Law is not to provide a "ladder" of good works, but rather:

1] To show man clearly that he cannot be saved by works, even keeping the Law!

Like an X-ray, it only shows the problem - it does not give power to heal it.

ROM 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, **I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, "\You shall not covet."**

Gal 3:19. Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions...

22 But **the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin**, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. 23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. 24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. 26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

2] To show the way God would provide a solution - the Old Testament sacrificial system teaches that God will provide a blameless substitute to pay for our sins. ¹³

II Cor. 5:21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

6. Salvation has always been by faith- alone!

a. Salvation was by faith prior to the advent of the Law!

1]. Adam and Eve; Abel and Cain

GEN 3:21 And the \Lord\ God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them. GEN 3:22 Then the \Lord\ God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"

2] Noah

3] Job

JOB 19:25 "And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the earth. JOB 19:26 "Even after my skin is destroyed, Yet from my flesh I shall see God;

4]. Abraham

GEN 15:5 And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." GEN 15:6 Then he believed in the \Lord;\ and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

ROM 4:1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? ROM 4:2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. ROM 4:3 For what does the Scripture say? "\And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.\" ROM 4:4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is

¹³ The Logic of Salvation, By [Dennis McCallum](#) and [Gary DeLashmutt](#); <http://www.xenos.org/classes/papers/logic.htm> .

due. ROM 4:5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness,

5] What about Isaac and Jacob?

6] Moses

EXO 3:6 He said also, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

NUM 12:7 "Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household; NUM 12:8 With him I speak mouth to mouth, Even openly, and not in dark sayings, And he beholds the form of the \Lord.\ Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant, against Moses? "#

7] How many people lived without the Covenant of Law from Adam to Moses?

ROM 4:16 For this reason {it is} by faith, that {it might be} in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

b. The Law of God provided a standing in the community of faith- Israel; but no Law provided salvation!

Gal. 3:21 Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law.

Gal. 3 17 What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. 18. For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

c. The Law proved to be unbearable! The first apostolic council recognized the new covenant and the new community of faith- the Church!

Acts 15:7 After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 "And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; 9 and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. **10 "Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?** 11 "But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are."

7. What is a graceful response to the charge of Antinomianism?

a. Preach a clear Gospel message!

1] Don't let an argument become a red herring to lead you away from the gospel!

1 Cor. 6:19 For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

Rom. 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

b. Live a Spirit-led life, one that is above reproach!

1] The love of God and sincere love for each other can pull the plug on debate!

1 Peter 2:12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

c. Give a reason for the hope that is in you!

1] Be prepared to explain the Gospel, including the need for growth and holiness!

1 Peter 3:15. but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Eph. 2:8,9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

**Councils of Trent
CHAPTER IX.**

Against the vain confidence of Heretics.

But, although it is necessary to believe that sins neither are remitted, nor ever were remitted save gratuitously by the mercy of God for Christ's sake; **yet is it not to be said, that sins are forgiven, or have been forgiven, to any one who boasts of his confidence and certainty of the remission of his sins, and rests on that alone;** seeing that it may exist, yea does in our day exist, amongst heretics and schismatics; and with great vehemence is this vain confidence, and one alien from all godliness, preached up in opposition to the Catholic Church. But neither **[Page 37]** is this to be asserted, -that they who are truly justified must needs, without any doubting whatever, settle within themselves that they are justified, and that no one is absolved from sins and justified, but he that believes for certain that he is absolved and justified; and that absolution and justification are effected by this faith alone: as though whoso has not this belief, doubts of the promises of God, and of the efficacy of the death and resurrection of Christ. For even as no pious person ought to doubt of the mercy of God, of the merit of Christ, and of the virtue and efficacy of the sacraments, even so each one, when he regards himself, and his own weakness and indisposition, may have fear and apprehension touching his own grace; **seeing that no one can know with a certainty of faith, which cannot be subject to error, that he has obtained the grace of God.**¹⁴

¹⁴ <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct06.html>