

Sanctification Lesson 8

Do all Christians agree that the OT moral law is the rule of life for the believer? How important is that question on a scale of 1-10? Why?

I. Introduction

- a. Thus far in this series we have concerned ourselves with distinguishing between various **nuances** of the doctrine of sanctification IE: consecration, ethics, positional and personal holiness, etc.
- b. What we have seen is that sanctification is both provided and yet at the same time commanded. From a biblical perspective we know that sanctification is an essential ingredient in all Christian living. That much is **undeniable**.
- c. We now turn our attention to the **antinomian** debate which impinges upon the doctrine of sanctification, but not just sanctification! Those who err in this debate have erred on **both** the positive and the negative sides of the debate.
- d. The arguments raised touch upon most **aspects** of Biblical theology and ultimately aim straight at the honor of God, and amount to a thrust against the veracity and authority of our Lord himself.

II. Definition & OT History of Antinomianism

- a. The word antinomian comes from the Greek anti (against) and nomos (law), and **technically** refers to the doctrine that it is not necessary for Christians to preach and / or obey the moral law of the OT.
- b. While the orthodox Christian position is that the purpose of God's moral law is to function as the **rule of life** for the believer, the antinomian debate is more slippery and complex than that statement might suggest.
- c. This is so because errors have popped up in the arguments of those who favor the keeping of the Law as well as in the arguments of those who oppose the keeping of the Law. One must be discerning to avoid the **pitfalls** of either side.
- d. Although this debate did not have a technical name until **Martin Luther** coined the term antinomian, a careful review of Biblical history reveals that the seeds of antinomianism are seen right from the very start. Gen.3:1,4 *'Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'; 4 'Ye shall not surely die'.*
- e. The seeds of antinomianism again emerge at Mt Sinai in the construction of the golden calf as Israel **abandoned** the clear command of God relating to worship. Ex 32:7-8 *And the Lord said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: 8 They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. KJV*
- f. The Book of **Judges** is characterized by antinomianism, as we see one generation after another described as having abandoned God's Law for their own idea of morality. Judges 21:25 *'every man did that which was right in his own eyes'*
- g. Antinomianism surfaced in **Jeremiah's** day when the people of God abandoned God's Word. Jer 7:8-10 *Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit. 9 Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye know not; 10 And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered to do all these abominations? KJV*

III. Antinomianism in New testament Times

- a. An antinomian view espoused by **Gnostics** stated that since the law came from the Demiurge and not from the true, loving Father, it was a Christian's duty to disobey it. Some forms of antinomian Gnosticism survived well into the Middle Ages.
- b. In a reversal of arguments, the Judaizers of the first generation of the Church attempted to push new believers into circumcision and a keeping of the ceremonial Law in order to secure their **justification** before God. Gal 2:16 *Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. KJV*
- c. Some early Christians taught that once persons are justified by faith in Christ, they no longer have any obligation toward the moral law because Jesus has **freed** them from it.
- d. A variant of this position is that since Christ has raised believers above the positive precepts of the law, they need to be obedient only to the immediate **guidance** of the Holy Spirit, who will keep them from sin.
- e. Moreover, various medieval heretical groups preached Corinthian - style freedom from the law, some going so far as to claim that even prostitution was not sinful for the **spiritual** person.
- f. Others said that since sin is inevitable anyway, there is no need to resist it. An extension of this view is the contention of some that since God, in his eternal decree, **willed sin**, it would be presumptuous to resist it.
- g. Finally, still others opposed the preaching of the law on the grounds that it is **unnecessary** and, indeed, contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- h. Several of the New Testament **epistles** testify to the fact that the early church was riddled with the curse of antinomianism in various ways (see, for example, Romans 6:1 *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? KJV*, Phil 3:18-19 *(For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) KJV* 1 Cor 5:1-2 *It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. 2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. KJV*

IV. Antinomianism from the Reformation

- a. 1500 years later in the early days of the **Reformation**, Luther taught that, after NT times, the moral law had only the negative value of preparing sinners for grace by making them aware of their sin.

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- b. Luther's student, Johann Agricola, went even further and denied any function of the law, believing that repentance should be induced only through the preaching of the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ.
- c. This debate between Luther and Agricola lasted about three years and spawned Luther's use of the term "antinomian" to describe the position of Agricola.
- d. The New England Puritans, attempting to clarify the place of "preparation for conversion" in covenant (or federal) theology, had come to the conclusion that salvation lay in fulfilling the conditions of God's covenant with humankind.
- e. The "conditions" leading to salvation included preparation for justification and a conscious effort on the part of the believer toward sanctification.
- f. While this notion was "pro-nomian" in its intent, it was strenuously legalistic. This led to errors in practice on the positive side of the question which we know today as the Salem witch trials.

V. The Antinomian Debate Today

- a. Today, the antinomian debate continues in the Church. For example, 7th Day Adventists continue to insist that we are duty bound to keep the moral Law and in particular to keep the Sabbath (Saturday).
- b. Further, failing to see the antinomian roots of their position, multitudes of Christians accept without question the notion that there is such a thing as a "carnal Christian" or one who has not made Christ Lord of his life.
- c. Others, erring on the "pro-nomian" side of the debate, assert that nothing short of sinless perfection is the only true Christianity. Their reasoning often reveals confusion between the concepts of justification and sanctification.
- d. Finally, because situation ethics and moral relativism either reject or diminish the normative force of moral law they too represent an antinomian secular attack on the moral Law of God in our day.

VI. Summary

- a. In general, antinomians who care about the Bible as the Word of God consider themselves to be taking a biblical stance. They do not ordinarily set out deliberately or deceitfully to be unbiblical.
- b. Inevitably however, they end up being just that. They misunderstand and misapply certain key Scripture texts. Jn.1:17 *'For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ'*; Rom.6:14 *'for ye are not under law, but under grace'*; Mt.5:17, *'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil'*.
- c. Many times the debate arises due to confusion and or lack of discernment as to the proper meaning of concepts such as "justification/ sanctification, works/grace, and even salvation itself.
- d. While there are countless different 'branches' of antinomianism, two basic varieties: 'practical' and 'doctrinal' are the easiest to nail down. In brief summary:
- e. **'Practical'** antinomianism holds that since salvation is entirely of grace and cannot be lost once it has been received, then why bother about keeping the commandments?
- f. The effect of this creates an endless cycle of sin, forgiveness; sin, forgiveness, and so on. This is the classic heresy Paul was dealing with in Romans 6, from those who urged continuance in sin so that grace may abound.
- g. In our own day, this is not unrelated to the false teaching that it is possible to separate the acceptance of Jesus as Savior from the acceptance of Him as Lord IE: the Carnal Christian heresy.
- h. **'Doctrinal'** antinomianism wants nothing to do with that, but argues that the way to growth in grace, promotion of sanctification and holiness of life is not by keeping the commandments per se.
- i. This they insist is the work of the Holy Spirit; Christians, they insist, must walk in the Spirit. From their perspective, this is an entirely spiritual walk requiring no direct human activity.

VII. The Orthodox Response to Antinomianism

- a. The Christian community as a whole has rejected antinomianism over the years for several reasons:
- b. It has regarded the view as damaging to the unity of the Bible, which demands that one part of the divine revelation must not contradict another.
- c. Even more important, it has argued that antinomians misunderstood the nature of justification by faith, which, though granted apart from the works of the law, is not sanctification.
- d. In general, orthodoxy teaches that the moral principles of the law are still valid, not as objective strivings but as fruits of the Holy Spirit at work in the life of the believer. God's Law as an ethical standard is good and beneficial to mankind.

VIII. Application

- a. Do you see any evidence of your own confusion or error as you examine the antinomian debate?