Antinomianism:

The Mosaic Law Confusion

G. Michael Cocoris

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THE ANTINOMIAN CONFUSION

A Bible college student emailed a pastor, a friend of mine, asking for "a brief statement of antinomianism." The student was writing a paper that required him to deal with antinomianism and he was looking for clarification and resources.

Most Christians have probably never heard of antinomianism. Many who have heard the word only have a vague notion of what it means. They know that it sounds like something that's not good. The most likely place to hear the word is in a heavy discussion of theology or a class dealing with theology.

What is antinomianism? Who are antinomians? One of the problems with discussing antinomianism is that no one claims to be an antinomian. People have not chosen the name; it is a pejorative term given to them. To complicate matters, it seems that at one time or another, everybody has been accused of being an antinomian, including the apostle Paul!

The Confusion

Paul The critics of the apostle Paul accused him of what was later called antinomianism. Paul wrote, "And *why* not *say,* 'Let us do evil that good may come'?—as we are slanderously reported and as some affirm that we say" (Rom. 3:8) and "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" (Rom. 6:1). In other words, since Paul was teaching justification is by faith alone, some were accusing him of teaching that people could trust Christ and do evil because God is gracious.

Wood says, "Although the expression is not found in Scripture, it is evident that Paul was libelously accused by his detractors of holding such a false doctrine. In Rom. 3:8, he denied heatedly the accusation that he had called right conduct irrelevant to Christian experience, and again made this repudiation in Rom. 6:1f., 15f" (Wood, vol. 1, p. 141).

The Reformers The Roman Catholics accused the Reformers of being antinomian (Bell, p. 52). Catholics were concerned that the doctrine of justification by faith alone would lead to moral laxity (sounds like what happened to Paul). Hence, the Council of Trent condemned the doctrine of justification by faith!

The Jesuits Within Roman Catholicism, Pascal accused the Jesuits of being antinomian, charging that Jesuit casuistry undermined moral principles (Pascal, *Lettres Provincials*).

Lutherans A few within early Lutheranism were labeled antinomian. Luther charged Agricola, his student and friend, with antinomianism. Other Lutherans were also accused.

Calvinists Arminians accuse Calvinists of antinomianism. "His (Arminius') followers have maintained that Reformed soteriology inevitably leads to carelessness and vitiates the seriousness of the call to holiness…. In John Wesley's view, Calvinism leads inexorably to antinomianism…. His protégé, John Fletcher, carried forward the charge with his book *Five Checks to Antinomianism* (1770). Charles Finney renewed the antinomian charge and has been a staple of Arminian polemics to this day" (www.whitehorseinn.org; see also Sell,

p. 81). Calvinists have accused each other of antinomianism! Richard Baxter accused John Owen of antinomianism.

Anabaptists Luther and others claimed the Anabaptists were antinomian.

Roger Williams Roger Williams was accused of antinomian teachings by the Puritans of New England.

Dispensationalists Covenant theologians denounce Dispensationalists as being antinomian (Gerstner, chapters 11 and 12, pp. 209-250).

Anyone who disagrees with Calvinism Calvinists are notorious for calling just about anybody who disagrees with them antinomian. In fact, it has been said that "antinomianism" is "Reformed theology's favorite theological cuss word" (Hodges, 4:2).

One Roman Catholic calls another Roman Catholic an antinomian. One Calvinist calls another Calvinist an antinomian. Arminians called Calvinists antinomians. Covenant theologians called Dispensationalists antinomian. What in the theological world is an antinomian?

A Clarification

Definition The word "antinomian" comes from two Greek words: *anti*, meaning "against" and *nomos*, meaning "law." Thus, the root meaning is "against the law." It is often defined as the belief that Christians do not have to obey *any* moral law (Latourette, p. 114; see also "antinomianism" at www.newadvent.org). Wood defines antinomianism as the belief that "Christians are exempt from the demands of the moral law by reason of their reliance upon the divine grace alone for salvation" (Wood, *ISBE*, vol. 1, p. 141).

Wow! Does that mean some Christians believe they do not have to obey *any moral law*? Not really. As the church historian Latourette says, it is a *theoretical doctrine*; most antinomians lead moral lives (Latourette, p. 215). In fact, to make that point clear, some use the term *doctrinal antinomianism*. Typically, when people accuse someone of being an antinomian, they are saying that a person's doctrine *leads* to some sort of licentiousness (which is what the Apostle Paul was accused of).

Diversity Actually, the word antinomian is used to describe a wide variety of ideas. For example, in his book *Concise Theology*, J. I. Packer says there are different types of antinomianism, including 1) Dualistic Antinomianism (Gnosticism), 2) Spirit-centered Antinomianism (the inner promptings of the Spirit apart from the Word), 3) Christ-centered Antinomianism ("God sees no sin in believers because they are in Christ, who kept the law for them, and therefore what they actually do makes no difference, provided that they keep believing"), 4) Dispensational Antinomianism (believers are not obligated to the moral law), and 5) Situationist Antinomianism (love is the only rule and, therefore, duties vary according to circumstance (Packer, pp. 178-180). That description is not totally accurate nor exhaustive, but his point that there are different types of antinomians is correct.

To understand antinomianism, it is necessary to understand the various ways the term has been used. Who has been accused of antinomianism and exactly what did those who were accused believe?

BEFORE THE REFORMATION

The word "antinomian" was coined by Martin Luther to describe the teaching of one of his students and friends, but the concept existed before Luther coined the term. For example, various groups of Gnostics, those who believe that the spiritual is good and the material is evil, have been accused of antinomianism.

Marcion

About AD 140, Marcion was a spokesman for Gnosticism, but he introduced his own ideas. He insisted on faith in Christ but rejected the humanity of Jesus and the resurrection of the body. He taught that Jesus was not born of a woman but suddenly appeared as a grown man in the synagogue at Capernaum. He was not like any other man except in His appearance. Since Marcion rejected the Old Testament, he has been labeled an antinomian, but there is no evidence that, in his case, it led to lawless living.

Manichaeus

Another Gnostic named Manichaeus (216-76) taught that salvation consists of liberating the light in the soul from the matter of the body by being exposed to the Light, Christ. Manicheans lived an ascetic life and performed rituals essential to releasing light. They placed so much emphasis on the ascetic life that they viewed sex as evil, thus emphasizing the superiority of the unmarried state.

"The followers of Marcion and the Manichaeans were antinomian in the sense that they rejected the Mosaic Law because it permitted marriage and even polygamy, concubinage, capital punishment, etc.; but they did not, so far as appears, make repudiation of the law an excuse for fleshly indulgence" (Newman, article on "Antinomianism").

Valentinus

Another first-century Gnostic was Valentinus (100-160). Wood says the Valentinians had the most definitive statement of antinomianism in its wildest and most immoral form. "The licentious practice of these Gnostics (standing in such marked contrast with severe asceticism of other schools within the movement) rose from an unscriptural dualism that erroneously divorced matter from the spirit. Since matter was thought to be irredeemably corrupt, the bodily passions could be indulged without inhibition, and in fact should be, so that the soul might shine as bright splendor by comparison. The maximum of Gnostic antinomianism was: 'Give to the flesh the things of the flesh and to the spirit the things of

the spirit'" (Wood, vol. 1, p. 141). Because of their view that Jesus did not have a real body, the Gnostics were not Christians in the biblical sense of the term (1 Jn. 4:3).

Summary: Before the Protestant Reformation, the Gnostics were accused of being antinomian; some practiced asceticism and some practiced licentiousness.

Antinomianism did not necessarily lead to lawless living, even among non-Christians. This is an important point. To be accused of antinomianism does not automatically mean the accused was living lawless lives. Paul was accused of antinomianism. He did teach that believers are not under the law but under grace (Rom. 6:14), but both he and Peter warned believers about antinomianism, defined as living without *any* moral law. Paul said, "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13). Peter wrote, "As free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God" (1 Pet. 2:16; see also 2 Pet. 3:17-18). Paul's teaching about the Law did not lead to lawlessness.

The same thing happened after the Protestant Reformation. Some who were accused of antinomianism lived immoral lives. For example, the Ranters of the seventeenth century were pantheists. "One of them, called Bottomley, wrote: 'It is not safe to go to the Bible to see what others have spoken and written of the mind of God as to see what God speaks within me, and to follow the doctrine and leading of it in me.' When George Fox rebuked them for their lewd practices, they answered, 'We are God'" (see Barclay, pp. 160-163).

Newman says the Ranters denied the existence of the devil, heaven, and hell. They declared Christ was a deceiver. Prayer is useless. Preaching and lying are all one. Scriptures are cast-off fables, and when they used them, they practiced absurd allegorizing. They claimed that nothing is a sin but what a man thinks is. Their practice corresponds with their immoral teaching." These people were not Christians in the biblical sense of the term.

John Wesley says that in Birmingham, "the fierce, unclean, brutish, blasphemous antinomians" had utterly destroyed the spiritual life of the congregation. He tells of a certain Roger Ball who insinuated himself into the life of the congregation at Dublin. At first, he seemed to be such a spiritually-minded man that the congregation welcomed him as being pre-eminently suited for the service and ministry of the church. He showed himself in time to be "full of guile and of the most abominable errors, one of which was that a believer had a right to all women." He would not communicate [take communion], for under grace, a man must "touch not, taste not, handle not." He would not preach and abandon the church services because, he said, "The dear Lamb is the only preacher."

In his *Journal*, John Wesley relates a conversation he had with Ball at Birmingham. It runs as follows: "Do you believe that you have nothing to do with the law of God?" "I have not; I am not under the law; I live by faith." "Have you, as living by faith, a right to everything in the world?" "I have. All is mine since Christ is mine." "May you then take anything you will anywhere? Suppose out of a shop without the consent or knowledge of the owner?" "I may, if I want, for it is mine. Only I will not give offense." "Have you a right to all the women in the world?" "Yes, if they consent." "And is not that a sin?" "Yes, to him who thinks it is a sin; but not to those whose hearts are free" (Wesley, cited by Barclay, pp. 160-163).

IN GERMANY

Doctrinal antinomianism began among the Lutherans in Germany while Martin Luther was still alive. As was mentioned, he coined the word "antinomian."

Johannes Agricola

The Background German theologian Gustav Kawerau explains the background of the controversy between Luther and Agricola. Originally, Luther used disparaging language of the Mosaic Law. He felt that it was "an ancient code devised under special conditions for a particular people, was superseded by the civil law of modern states, and no longer possessed for Christians a juridical or ceremonial force." He said things such as "away with Moses forever, who shall not terrify deluded hearts" and "Moses was given to the Jewish people alone and has nothing to do with us Gentiles and Christians."

Furthermore, "in his emphasis on justification by faith, Luther asserted that true repentance proceeded from a realizing sense of the work of Christ. The preaching of faith was to take precedence of all else, since faith having been attained, contrition and consolation spontaneously followed."

Nevertheless, "in 1520, the process of salvation was described by him as beginning with the operation of the law upon the soul, which in repentance casts about for aid and is met with the promise of remission of sins through Christ." In 1527, Melanchthon "placed the preaching of the law at the portal of Christian instruction, asserting that it led to repentance, which was the antecedent of faith, and without which the preaching of the gospel was unintelligible" (Kawerau, in the same article on Antinomianism co-authored with Newman in the *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*).

Johannes Agricola (1494-1566) Johannes Agricola studied at Wittenberg, where he became a friend of Luther. After teaching at Wittenberg, he ministered at Frankfurt (1525) and Eisleben (1526-36), his hometown. In 1527, Agricola had a disagreement with Melanchthon. Wood says Agricola "denied that the preaching of the Law should proceed or accompany the preaching of the gospel in order to arouse a sense of sin." Agricola declared, "The Decalogue belongs to the courthouse, not the pulpit." His slogan was "to the gallows with Moses" (Wood, vol. 1, p. 141). Agricola held that knowledge of sin was wrought by the gospel, not by the Law ("Antinomianism" at www.cyclopedia.lcms.org). Apparently, Agricola emphasized Luther's earlier statements of repentance as a consequence of the gospel of divine grace. Agricola was an antinomian because he did not believe it was necessary to preach the Law before preaching the gospel. In a conference at Torgau (November 26-28, 1527), Luther made peace between Melanchthon and Agricola by distinguishing between faith in the general sense (*fides generalis*), as indeed antedating repentance, and the justifying faith which, impelled by conscience, apprehends divine grace.

When Agricola returned to Wittenberg in 1536 to teach, the controversy flared up again. In 1537, Agricola anonymously wrote against Luther and Melanchthon, urging people to resist them to preserve pure doctrine. Agricola claimed that Luther and Melanchthon's "mode of justification" was sometimes "pure," sometimes "impure." He had three charges of impurity, each supported by a quotation from Luther and Melanchthon: 1) Since Christ commands that repentance and remission of sins are to be preached in His name, the Decalogue is to be taught. 2) The Law has been given to humiliate us so that we may seek Christ. 3) The office of the Law is to torment and terrify the conscience so that it may know Christ more readily.

In July 1537, and again in September, Luther preached against antinomianism without mentioning Agricola, but on December 1, 1537, Luther published the accusations of Agricola and others and also announced a number of disputations (debates) against antinomianism.

The first disputation was held on December 18, 1537. Luther argued that people needed to be taught the Law so that they might recognize the greatness of their sin. Then, they need to be given the gospel that they might be justified freely by God's grace. He concludes, "The Law, therefore, cannot be eliminated, but it remains prior to Christ." Luther goes on to respond to the antinomians. They say, "The Law is impossible. Therefore, we are not obligated to do it." Luther argues that by being given the Spirit, those who believe in Christ begin to fulfill the Law in this life and will do it perfectly in the life to come. They say, "The Law of God is to be removed from the church." Luther responds that believers are not under the curse of the Law or the ceremonial Law, but they are under the moral Law. Luther also argues that it is "ridiculous" to say that the Law is not to be preached just because God converts the heart out of mercy.

Since Agricola did not attend the first disputation, Luther challenged him to a second disputation, which took place on January 12, 1538. A reconciliation took place, but it did not entirely settle the conflict.

In 1539, Luther wrote *Against the Antinomians*. Here are selected statements from that article: "The Antinomians have undertaken to thrust the law of God or the Ten Commandments out of the church and to remit them to the secular court." He calls John Agricola by name and says, "He was one of my best and nearest friends." He states, "I have taught and still teach that sinners must be moved to repentance by the preaching and pondering of the sufferings of Christ, that they may see how great the wrath of God is against sin: and that it cannot be otherwise expiated but by the death of the Son of God" (this was Agricola's point). Luther argues that "Sinners can, and must, be drawn to repentance, not only by the sweetness of grace, that *Christ* suffered and died for us, but also by the terrors of the Law." To prove his point, he cites the statement, "I've smitten him for the sins of my people" in Isaiah 53 and says the meaning is "because my people have sinned against my law." He cites, "Where no law is, there is no sin" in Romans 5 to support his contention that the Law must be preached to the lost. Luther also contends that the Law belongs in the church for Christians. He refers to the forgiveness of sins in the Lord's Prayer and argues, "How can we know what sin is, if there be no law" (see the

whole article at www.truecovenanter.com/truelutheran/luther_against_the_antinomians, accessed 5/17/2013).

Later, Agricola helped prepare the "Augsburg Interim" of 1548, an agreement that called for the Protestants to accept Catholic authority, doctrine, and practice except the Protestant teaching of justification. One of the most radical reformers ended his life capitulating to Catholicism!

At any rate, Pyne sums up the controversy between Luther and Agricola when he writes, "He (Agricola) was against the preaching of the law as a means of making unbelievers aware of their sin, maintaining that the preaching of the gospel of God's grace was sufficient to lead one to repentance. Though this seems to have been Luther's own emphasis at one time, he believed Agricola was not responding adequately to the increasing immorality of a society that was releasing itself from the shackles of papal authority. Luther argued that in addition to denying the use of the law in evangelism, Agricola also disregarded it in his ethical teachings to believers. This, however, does not seem to have been an accurate charge. Agricola did not preach license; instead, he maintained that through the gospel, God would make the believer desire to live godly. From Agricola's perspective, Luther had misunderstood his position" (Pyne, p. 142).

Andreas Poach

In 1556, the second Antinomian Controversy began within Lutheranism. Andreas Poach and Anton Otto, Luther's students, were of the opinion that they were the true custodians of Luther's teaching regarding the proper function of the Law. According to Poach, "The most proper effect of the law is in the revealing and demonstrating of our works, that is, our sins—to accuse, to thoroughly terrify, to kill and to damn." Thus, "the law is to be taught not for salvation, but for death and damnation." He denied that the Law was of any service whatsoever to Christians, and he argued that faith created works spontaneously in the believer apart from any coercion of the Law. Poach and his colleagues were labeled antinomians.

Wood calls the view of Poach and Otto an extreme form of antinomianism, saying that they taught Christians are "above all obedience" (Wood, vol. 1, p. 141). That is not true. They believed faith spontaneously created works in the believer apart from the Law.

The Formula of Concord (1577) rejected antinomianism. It declared that there were three purposes of the Law: 1) for outward discipline, 2) for revealing sin, and 3) for the rule of life to the regenerate, who need it because of their Old Adam [sin nature]. In other words, the Law is to be used in the courthouse, in evangelism, and in the Christian's life as a rule of life.

Anabaptists

Wood says, “Antinomian echoes may be heard in succeeding centuries among the Anabaptists in Germany and Holland, the Illuminati in Spain, and the Camisard in France” (Wood, vol. 1, p. 141). The Anabaptists were confident they were complete in Christ and absolutely sure of salvation by reason of their standing in Him. They wanted to deliver people from legal bondage and bring them into gospel liberty. Thus, they were accused of antinomianism. That does not mean they lived lawless lives. In his autobiography, Richard Baxter (1615-1691) wrote, “For the Anabaptists themselves (though I have written and said so much against them), as I have found most of them were persons of zeal in religion, so many of them were sober, godly people: and differ from others, in the point of infant baptism: or at most in the points of predestination, free will, and perseverance” (Baxter, p. 140, cited by Neal, vol. II, p. 280 fn.).

Summary: In Germany, among the Lutherans, Agricola was accused of being antinomian because he did not believe it was necessary to preach the Law before preaching the gospel (the preaching of the gospel of grace was sufficient to lead people to repentance and make believers desired to live a godly life) and Poach was accused of being antinomian because he taught that faith spontaneously created works in the believer apart from the Law.

IN ENGLAND

In the 17th century, several pastors in England were accused of antinomianism. Three of the most outstanding were Puritans! Daniel Neal (1678-1743) was an English historian who wrote a multivolume set entitled *History of the Puritans*. The various volumes appeared between 1732 and 1738 (I own the three-volume 1979 reprint of the 1837 edition). John Eaton, Tobias Crisp, and John Saltmarsh are listed in his *History*.

John Eaton

His Life John Eaton (ca. 1575-1641) earned a B.A. (1595) and M.A. (1603) at Trinity College, Oxford. He was a vicar in Wickham Market from 1604 to 1619. In 1619, he was removed from his parish for being "an incorrigible divulger of errors and false opinions." He was "exceedingly admired in the neighborhood where he lived and strangely (highly) valued for many years after his death." It was said of him that he was "a pattern of faith, holiness, and cheerfulness, in his suffering to succeeding generations" (Neal, vol. II, p. 94). He is said to be one of the founders of the sect of antinomians.

His Books None of his writings were permitted to be published in his lifetime. After his death appeared *The Discovery of a Most Dangerous Dead Faith* (1641), *Abraham's Steps of Faith* (1641), *The Honey-comb of Free Justification by Christ alone, collected out of the mere Authorities of Scripture* (1642). He was imprisoned for publishing a former edition of the last article. For several years, he was questioned and censured for maintaining that God could not see sin in those who were justified.

His Theology Eaton made a distinction between the time of the Law, which he called glorious, the time of John the Baptist, which he called more glorious, and the Christian dispensation, which he called most glorious. He said under the Mosaic Law, "sin was severely taken hold of, and punished sharply in God's children…. John laid open their sins, and the danger of them, yet we read not of any punishment inflicted on God's children…. The third time, the most glorious, is since Christ groaned out his blood and life upon the cross, by which sin itself, guilt, and punishment are so utterly and infinitely abolished that there is no sin in the Church of God, and that now God sees no sin in us; and whosoever believeth not this point is undoubtedly damned" (Newman).

Pyne says, "Following Luther's understanding of imputed righteousness, again and again, Eaton emphasized that justification made sinners righteous 'objectively and passively,' not 'inherently and actively.' This meant that the Christian recognizes himself to be, in the words of Luther, 'both righteous and a sinner.' The imputed righteousness of Christ was seen as the basis for one's assurance, for the flesh continues to burden believers with their sinfulness in spite of the fact that believers are declared righteous in the eyes of God.

"In response to those who taught that assurance of justification could be found only in one's sanctification, Eaton argued that finding assurance in works of righteousness could

too easily cause one to depend on those works. Consequently, Eaton felt that Christians must find assurance in their justification, promise, and faith; then, they could do good works 'in thankfulness for their assurance.'

"Eaton and his peers also emphasized that sanctification consists of the Spirit's work in the believer, suggesting that 'the justified are not really altered in their own human nature at all.' Eaton taught that believers had 'two souls,' a 'material' one, in which he lives only to the world, and 'his soul as he is in Christ,' which substantially is Christ's own righteousness and which causes him to live a godly life.' Crisp held a similar view, stating that believers 'themselves can do nothing but commit sin. If a … believer … does anything that is good, it is the Spirit of God that does it, not he; therefore, he himself does nothing but sin, his soul is a mint of sin.'

"The view that the regenerate self cannot sin while the old self can only sin suggested to some observers that these men were unconcerned about personal holiness" (Pyne, 142-143).

Tobias Crisp

His Life Tobias Crisp (1600–1642) was a popular pastor in England. He earned a B.A. from Cambridge and received a D.D. from Oxford. In 1627, he became rector of Brinkworth. "He was certainly a learned and religious person, modest and humble in his behavior, fervent and laborious in his ministerial work, and exact in his morals" (Neal, vol. II, p. 184).

"Crisp entered the ministry as an unconverted man. His preaching was highly legalistic, emphasizing good works as a means, rather than an outcome, of grace. Yet, he strove earnestly to glorify God in his life and ministry and quickly gained a reputation for popular, forthright preaching. As Crisp delved into the Word to bring comfort to lost souls, his own soul lost the shackles of trust in his own righteousness and he was granted faith in the righteousness of Christ who bore away his sins" (George M. Ella, www.evangelica.de/articles/biographies/tobias-crisp-1600-1643-exalter-of-christ-alone, accessed May 7, 2013). "Crisp's preaching was highly expository but at the same time thoroughly evangelical, with the preacher applying each truth to the situation of the hearer as he laid out his text. His emphasis was on Christ as the only way to salvation, on free grace, and especially on how to grow in that grace" (Ella).

His Books Crisp did not publish anything, but after his death, in 1643,1644, and 1646, his friends published three volumes of sermons from his notes, entitled *Christ alone Exalted, in the Perfection and Encouragement of his Saints, notwithstanding their Sins and Trials.* Years later, to answer the charges against Crisp, his son Samuel republished *Christ alone Exalted* with an additional ten sermons, which he transcribed out of his father's notes, including Crisp's sermon on Titus 2:11-12, *How Grace in Christ Teacheth Godliness, not Licentiousness,* and another on Galatians 3:19, on *The Use of the Law.*

The Controversy Pastors in London opposed Crisp, accusing him of being an antinomian. He and fifty-two opponents had a dispute concerning the freeness of the grace

of God in Jesus Christ to sinners. He vigorously defended the glorious doctrine of free grace. Ella explains that Crisp was accused "of denying the need for righteousness and affirming that as one was safe and secure in Jesus, one could live as one wished." Ella goes on to say that "it had become respectable evangelicalism to teach that Christ's atonement merely prepared the way for salvation, which was to be secured by good works. Those who did not believe this were termed 'licentious.'"

His Theology Purkis says, "Crisp has the ability to lay sinful man in the dust and exalt the saving Jesus to the heavens, which has scarce if ever, found the like among men. Such preaching and doctrine have sadly and falsely had the charge of antinomianism laid against it. The fact that Crisp was no Antinomian can be easily refuted from his sermons, especially *Free Grace the Teacher of Good Works* and *The Use of the Law*, which abundantly prove the contrary. For example, in the sermon, *Men's Own Righteousness Their Grand Idol*, Crisp writes, 'I speak not against the doing of any righteousness according to the will of God revealed. Let that mouth be forever stopped that shall open to blame the law that is holy, just, and good, or shall be the means to discourage people from walking in the commandments of God blameless. All that I speak is this: that it will prove a rock of offense in the end, if it is not turned from, namely, that we should expect that our own righteousness should bring down a gracious answer from God to our spirits'" (Purkis, www.sounddoctrine.net/Classic_Sermons/Tobias%20Crisp/Christ).

Purkis also points out, "Tobias also believed, correctly, that the imputation of sins upon Christ was real, as was the imputation of His righteousness to the sinner. His view, although wholly Scriptural, was condemned as an error, and he was much criticized for it. Though this teaching was not popular then and is no more popular now, it is a most glorious truth of the Gospel, and one to which all those who see themselves lost in sin and saved by free and sovereign grace will readily concur. Crisp saw man as lost, absolutely helpless and unable before God, with righteousness as filthy rags and carnal, sold under sin, and saw Christ as the all-sufficient Savior of his people, their surety, their all, and all in all, the Blessed, Holy One of God who bore all their sins away, and who wrought out a robe of his righteousness with which he freely clothes his people. 'Christ represents our persons to the Father; we represent the person of Christ to him; all the loveliness the person of Christ hath, that is put upon us; and we are lovely with the Father, even as the Son himself.' That such saving truths should be labeled Hyper-Calvinism and Antinomianism is a sad reflection upon the majority of professors, both in his day and ours."

His Sermons Crisp defended himself against some of the charges leveled against him in a sermon entitled "Christian Liberty No Licentious Doctrine." In it, he argued, "But some will say, by this, it seems we take away all endeavors and employment from believers, the free men of Christ. Doth Christ do everything for them? Do they stand righteous before God, with respect to what he hath done for them? Then, they may sit still: they may do what they wish.

"I answer, Will you deny this, that we are righteous with God, and that we are righteous with God by the righteousness of Christ? Or is it by our own righteousness? Then mark what the apostle saith, Rom 10:3, 4, 'They (saith he, speaking of the Jews), going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of

God, for Christ is the end of the law for righteousness, to everyone that believeth.' Either you must disclaim Christ's righteousness, or you must disclaim your own; for, if the gift of God 'be of grace, then it is not of works, else work is no more work; and, if it be of works, it is no more of grace; otherwise grace is no more grace,' Rom 11:6.

"But you will say further to me for, except a man be a mere Papist, I am sure he cannot deny, but that the righteousness by which I stand righteous before GOD, is the righteousness Christ doth for me, and not that I do for myself, you will ask me, I say, Doth not this take off all manner of obedience and all manner of holiness?

"I answer, and thus much I say, It takes them off from those ends which they aim at in their obedience: namely, The end for which Christ's obedience served: as much as to say, Our standing righteousness, by what Christ hath done for us, concerns us in point of justification, consolation, and salvation. We have our justification, our peace, our salvation, only by the righteousness Christ hath done for us: but this doth not take away our obedience, nor our services, in respect of those ends for which such are now required of believers. We have several ends for duties and obedience, namely, that they may glorify God, and evidence our thankfulness, that they may be profitable to men, that they may be ordinances wherein to meet with God, to make good what he hath promised. So far, we are called out to services, and walking uprightly, sincerely, exactly, and strictly, according to the good pleasure of God; and, in regard of such ends, there is a gracious freedom that the free-men of Christ have by him; that is, so far forth as services and obediences are expected at the free-man's hand, for the ends that I have named, there is Christ, by his Spirit, present with those that are free-men, to help them in all such kind of services, so that 'they become strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might,' to do the will of God. Mark what the apostle speaks: 'I am able to do all things through Christ that strengthens me. Of myself (saith he) I am able to do nothing; but with Christ, and through him that strengthens me, I am able to do all things.' He that is Christ's free-man hath always the strength of Christ present, answerable to that weight and burthen of employment God calls him forth unto. 'My grace (saith Christ) shall be sufficient for thee, and my strength shall be made perfect in weakness.' As you are free-men of Christ, you may confidently rest upon it, that he 'will never fail you, nor forsake you,' when he calls you forth into employments. But you that are under the law, there is much required of you, and imposed upon you, but no help to be expected. You must do all by your own strength; the whole tale of brick shall be exacted of you, but no straw shall be given you. But you, that are free-men of Christ, he will help you: he will oil your wheels, fill your sails, and carry you upon eagles' wings, that you shall run and not be weary, walk and not faint. So, then, the free-men of Christ, having him and his Spirit for their life and strength, may go infinitely beyond the exactest legalist in the world, in more cheerful obedience than they can perform. He that walks in his own strength can never steer his business so well and so quickly, as he that hath the arms, the strength, and the principles of the great God of heaven and earth; as he that hath this great Supporter, this wise Director, this mighty Assister, to be continually by him. There is no burthen, you shall bear, but, by this freedom, you have him to put his own shoulder to it to bear it up" (Crisp, cited by Ella).

In another sermon, Crisp said, "Do but look in Eph. 2:4-10, and there you shall perceive how clear and full the apostle is in this business, that Christ is made a way to life absolutely and merely of free gift; 'But God, saith he, 'who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ; by grace ye are saved: and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Jesus Christ, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.' Mark how he goes on; 'For by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast; for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.' Still, he runs upon mercy and grace, and works he excludes, that no creature might boast.

"If anything were done on our part, to partake of Christ, we might have whereof to boast. So likewise speaking of Abraham, Rom 4:2, 'For if Abraham were justified by works, he had whereof to glory;' we should have to glory, if we should have the least hand in the participating of Christ; therefore God would give Christ freely unto his creature; because man should have no stroke in participating of him, that so it might be to the praise of the glory of his grace; that we should not glory; yea, 'That no flesh should glory in his presence.' And, therefore, the same apostle, Eph. 3:12, tells us that from this grace, 'we have boldness, and access with confidence through the faith of him.' In regard that Christ is given unto men to be a way unto the Father, and merely of free gift, hence it is that we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.

"Should we regard our own works or qualifications, there would be some mixture of distrust; we should have some fear that God would find out such and such a thought; therefore, we could never come with boldness and confidence, if we did not come in Christ as a free gift bestowed upon us: for if there were one condition, and the least failing in that condition, God might take advantage upon that default, and so possibly we might miscarry; and we being jealous and privy to it, that there are faults in all we do, we should be 'subject all our lives to bondage,' (saith the apostle), and should fear that God will take advantage of all that which is undone on our part; and so not fulfill what he hath promised on his part. But seeing we have Christ bestowed as a free gift of the Father, 'we come with boldness and access to the throne of grace.' To establish, or a little more to clear this, look (Heb. 10:18-20) 'Now where remission of sin is, there is no more offering for sin; having therefore boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way that he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.' How come we to have boldness? Through the new and living way made by the blood of Christ; not a new and living way by his blood and our actions, but by his blood; that is, only by his blood, merely by his actions; and so passed over freely to us; this is that which makes us come with so much boldness.

"Look into the closure of all the scriptures, you shall find there can be nothing imagined more free; nay, so free, as the participating of Christ to be the way to the Father; nothing so free as this, (Rev. 22:17) 'Both the Spirit and the bride say, come; let him that heareth, say, come; and let him that is athirst, come; and whosoever will, (mark the expression) let him take of the water of life freely.' Hast thou but a mind to Christ? come and take the

water of life freely; it is thine; it is given to thee; there is nothing looked for from thee to take thy portion in this Christ; thine he is as well as any person's under Heaven; therefore, you shall find our Savior exceedingly complain of this, as a great fault, 'You will not come to me, that you might have life;' 'He that comes to me, I will in no wise cast him off;' upon no terms. Thou mayest object a thousand things, that if thou shouldst come, and conclude Christ is thy Christ, he will reject thee, and that it will be but presumption; but, in so doing, thou rejectest thyself, and forsakest thy own mercy; but Christ saith, Whosoever he be, what person soever, 'I will in no wise cast him off if he come unto me" (Crisp, cited by Ella).

Crisp also said: "There is no believer who hath received Christ, but he is created in him unto good works that he should walk in them. He that sprinkleth clean water upon them, that they become clean from all their filthiness, also puts a new spirit within them, and doth cause them to walk in his statutes and testimonies. So, I say that the sanctification of life is an inseparable companion with the justification of a person by the free grace of Christ. But I must withal tell you that all this sanctification of life is not a jot of the way of that justified person unto heaven. It is the business a man hath to do in his way, Christ" (Crisp, cited by Ella).

His Condemnation Crisp died in 1642. In 1704, 13 churches in the Western Association Baptist Conference "denounced Crisp's doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ as tending to 'overthrow natural, as well as revealed religion.' On the Crisp side, we find such outstanding evangelicals as Twisse, Traill, Toplady, Hervey, Gill, Ryland Sen., Whitefield, Boston, the Erskines, John Brown of Whitburn, Huntington, those Anglicans who hold Article XIII dear and many modern Particular Baptists, in fact, all true Reformed men" (Ella).

His Testimony Crisp did not live a licentious life. He was a godly man. Lancaster, the publisher of his works, says, "His life was so innocent and harmless from all evil, and so zealous and fervent in all good, that it seemed to be designed as a practical refutation of the slander of those who would insinuate that his doctrine tended to licentiousness."

Gill wrote, 'Is this Antinomianism? Or can such a preacher be called an Antinomian?' Crisp believed, as Isaiah the Prophet did, that man had absolutely no righteousness of his own, nor could he, and that his best works were stained with guilt and sin. In his sermon *Men's Own Righteousness Their Grand Idol*, he writes, 'It must be Christ that prevails with the Father for us; all our righteousness will prevail nothing at all with God, not move him a jot, except it be to pull down wrath; there is not one act of righteousness that a person doth, but when that is finished, there is more transgression belonging to him, than before he had performed it: and there is no composition, there is no buying out of evil by good doings; the doing of good doth not make a recompense for what sin doth: we pay but our debts in doing good; so that as there is a new righteousness performed, there is still a new reckoning added to the former; by acting of righteousness, you make up a greater number of sins than before; so that it is only Christ from whom we must have the expectation of success, in whatsoever thing we desire" (Gill, cited by Purkis).

William Twisse, the prolocutor to the Westminster Assembly of Divines, said that he "had read Dr. Crisp's sermons, and could give no reason why they were so opposed, but

because so many were converted by his preaching, and so few by ours" (Twisse, cited by Purkis).

Cole, a man Gill called "a truly good man" and an author of a treatise on regeneration, said that if he had but one hundred pounds in the world, and Dr. Crisp's book could not be had without giving fifty pounds for it, he would give it rather than be without it; saying "I have found more satisfaction in it, than in all the books in the world, except the Bible" (Cole, cited by Purkis).

Pyne points out that "the view that the regenerate self cannot sin while the old self can only sin suggested to some observers that these men were unconcerned about personal holiness. Though Eaton and Crisp were not preaching moral license, critics believed their model of sanctification would logically lead to that, and so they spoke of them as antinomians or libertines" (Pyne, p. 143).

John Saltmarsh

His Life John Saltmarsh (died 1647) studied at Magdalene College, Cambridge. He was a minister at Northampton (1635), then at Braisted in Kent (1645), and was a chaplain in the army of Thomas Fairfax. He was a good preacher who preached love and unity and who labored to draw people to Christ (Neil, vol. II, p. 497). From his deathbed, he wrote to admonish Fairfax on backsliding. Samuel Rutherford accused Saltmarsh of antinomianism.

His Theology In an article published in the *Harvard Theological Review*, David Parnham examines John Saltmarsh's view of redemption "in his own terms" (David Parnham, "John Saltmarsh and the Mystery of Redemption," *Harvard Theological Review*, July 01, 2011). The following material comes from that article.

In 1646, John Saltmarsh wrote *Free Grace*, or *The Flowings of Christ's Blood Freely to Sinners.* As a result, he was called a heretic, blasphemer, impugner of the godly ministry, and paragon of antinomian error. Parnham says Saltmarsh's purpose was to "'to seek out how the riches of free Grace are offered, and how the Law is established by the Gospel.' Christian 'duties' and 'graces' must not be looked upon as products of the law, but instead as effects of Christ, the 'fountain' and 'cause.' Mysterious matters will dominate future seekings: how 'our being' is 'in' Christ and he is 'in us,' and how this interpenetration enables the circuitry of duties and graces 'that flow from Christ into his, and back again from his into Christ.' By 1646, it was evident that English divines were minded more by matters of law than of gospel, and that Saltmarsh must himself serve as an agent of clarification. He entered the arena, for the subject at hand was controversial but remained wary about raising dust and radiating heat."

According to Parnham, "Saltmarsh's reaction (to Puritan legalism) was to put trust in a grace at once free and unconditional and to hone a sensitivity to the vexatious effects of legalistic piety. He retreated from the 'antinomian' label but found little fault with antinomian theology. Antinomians, according to Saltmarsh, had exaggerated the operation of grace, but they had not erred in retrenching the Mosaic Law. Antinomianism, by

Saltmarsh's lights, was a theological rather than a behavioral phenomenon; accordingly, Saltmarsh could ignore the commonplace that the abandonment of Moses would precipitate a spoliation [destruction] of morality. Grace effected freedom from Mosaic bondage, and with grace came an unstoppable outpouring of good works — spontaneous acts inspired by the gift of love, not mechanical requisites of a cudgeling law."

Shortly before Saltmarsh's *Free-Grace, The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* by Samuel Bolton, Puritan pastor, appeared. As Parnham explains, "Freedom" meant different things for Bolton and Saltmarsh. Bolton "delivers a lengthy set-piece exhortation upon the making of 'a right use of Moses.' Bolton attended doggedly to the law's necessary role in ensuring that 'the deluge of lust and corruption in men, doth not break forth to the overflowing of all banks.'" For Bolton, a "holy-walking believer must by necessity accept Moses too; the one was tied to the other by the unbreakable bond of the moral law. Saltmarsh "resolved that the law's force was interminably in the nature of a curse and a bondage — troublesome, ponderous, an impediment to spiritual and affective deliverance, an instrument more of coercion than of freedom." Saltmarsh will not "summon the law to remediate lust, for this was to evoke a flawed technique to supersede a promised freedom." For Saltmarsh, "Redemption freed the soul from legalistic piety."

Here are statements from Parnham's article that clarify Saltmarsh's position. The words in quotes are from Saltmarsh himself.

Saltmarsh taught that believers are "justified before they believe"—an implication that Saltmarsh formulated explicitly in *Sparkles of Glory* of 1647.

"The Spirit of Christ sets a believer as free from Hell, the Law, and bondage here on Earth, as if he were in Heaven." His point is that united with Christ, the believer is safe in the here and now and will be, too, in the hereafter. Our debts of sin have been "paid and canceled by the blood of Christ; and by this, all bondages, fears and doubtings are removed" Christ alone "brings the prisoners out of prison"; his nature, office, and work constitute the "ground" of the believer's "exemption from the Law, sin, and the curse."

Assurance requires the believer "to see everything in himself as nothing, and himself everything in Christ." Saltmarsh resorted to the "free promises" of the gospel. This was the way in which to acquire assurance. It was also a flint for the sparking of controversy.

Because we are "ever under grace," we are "no more under the Law." "We work, and walk, and live under the Gospel, as being saved already, and redeemed, and bringing forth the power of this redemption and salvation, through the spirit of adoption, freely working to the praise of that free-grace, and freely obeying for such free redemption, and doing everything in love, because of the love shed abroad in our hearts."

The gospel delivers "commands for obedience, as well as tidings of forgivenesse." "I never yet denied the Graces and Fruits of the Spirit of God," Saltmarsh submits, "which appear in Faith, Repentance, new Obedience, Mortification of sin."

Later in the decade, Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661), a Presbyterian theologian and author in Scotland, scourged Saltmarsh for his theological crimes. Rutherford was educated at Edinburgh University, where, in 1623, he became Regent of Humanity (Professor of Latin). In 1627, he became minister of Anwoth. In 1638, he was made Professor of Divinity

at St. Andrews, and in 1651, Rector of St. Mary's College there. He was one of the Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly.

Bell points out one of the major differences between Saltmarsh and Rutherford. Based on the doctrine of unlimited atonement, the antinomians taught that the assurance of salvation is of the essence of faith and that where there is true faith, doubting cannot exist (Bell, p. 80). Saltmarsh taught that nowhere in the New Testament can we find examples of people questioning "whether they believe or not; or whether their faith was true or no" (Bell, p. 82).

Rutherford believed in limited atonement (Bell, p. 72) and preparation before a person could believe in Christ. The preparation consisted of being broken by the Law and being self-condemned (Bell, p. 77). He also asserted that "although Christ freed us from the law's curse, he did not 'free us from act of obedience by his grace to the law'" (Bell, p. 74). Bell points out that "The effects of his (Rutherford) teaching on preparation for faith, justification and sanctification, and faith is an act of the will, was to turn one inward, and away from the person and work of Jesus Christ. The individual must look within for a work of preparation, lest he believe too soon. The stress in our justification is not on Jesus Christ crucified, but on our experience of faith, for according to Rutherford, it is not until the moment of believing that we are justified" (Bell, p. 80). For Rutherford, works are a fallible sign which may be used to convince us that we are in a state of grace. Assurance of salvation is gained by self-examination (Bell, p. 82).

Like Calvin, the antinomians taught that people are passive in the work of faith, but because of the lengths to which they took the notion of passivity, Rutherford rejected it entirely (Bell, pp. 79-80).

John Flavel (against antinomianism)

John Flavel (ca.1627–1691) was a Puritan pastor and prolific author in England. In 1690, he wrote a book, part of which was later published by the Presbyterian Board of Publication under the title of *A Blow at the Root of Antinomianism* (1840). It has been called Flavel's concern with *doctrinal* antinomianism. Flavel says that good and wicked men have been guilty of antinomianism. Wicked men, such as the Gnostics, the Manichæans, the Valentinians, etc., adopted it so that they might sin. Others were tainted with antinomianism, but they were godly people. Flavel lists and refutes ten antinomian errors of such men as Eaton, Crisp, and Saltmarsh.

Error 1. Acknowledging that their error concerning justification by faith did not affect their practice, Flavel charges that Crisp and others teach that justification is an eternal act of God; the elect were justified before the world began or when Christ died.

Error 2. Antinomians teach that justification by faith is nothing more than a manifestation of what was already done. Flavel mentions Saltmarsh's definition of faith, which is "being persuaded more or less of Christ's love to us; so that when we believe, that which was hidden before doth then appear."

Error 3. Antinomians teach "that men ought not to doubt of their faith, or question, whether we believe." Flavel cites Saltmarsh, who said we ought no more to question our faith than to question Christ (*Saltmarsh, Free Grace*, p. 92, 95).

Error 4. Antinomians teach "that believers are not bound to confess sin, mourn for it, or pray for the forgiveness of it; because it was pardoned before it was committed; and pardoned sin is no sin" (Eaton, *Honeycomb*, pp. 446-447).

Error 5. Antinomians teach "that God sees no sin in believers, whatsoever sins they commit." Eaton says that God can see no adultery, no lying, no blasphemy, in believers; for though believers do fall into such enormities, yet all their sins being pardoned from eternity, they are no sins in them (Eaton, *Honeycomb*, chap. 7 pp. 136-137).

Error 6. Antinomians teach "that God is not angry with the elect, nor doth he smite them for their sins; and to say that he doth so is an injurious reflection upon the justice of God."

Error 7. Antinomians teach "that by God's laying our iniquities upon Christ, he became as completely sinful as we, and we as completely righteous as Christ" (*Crisp*, p. 270).

Error 8. Antinomians teach "that believers need not fear either their own sins, or the sins of others; for that neither their own, nor any other men's sins can do them any hurt, nor must they do any duty for their own salvation."

Error 9. Antinomians "will not allow the new covenant to be made properly with us, but with Christ for us; and that this covenant is all of it a promise, having no condition on our part. They do not absolutely deny that faith, repentance, and obedience are conditions in the new covenant; but say they are not conditions on our part but Christ's; and that he repented, believed, and obeyed for us (*Saltmarsh, of Free Grace*, pp. 126-127).

Error 10. Antinomians teach that it is "a fundamental error, to make sanctification an evidence of justification."

Summary: In 17th century England, pastors who were accused of antinomianism believed such things as: 1) our sin is imputed to Christ and His righteousness is imputed to us (Crisp), 2) assurance of salvation is based on God's promise of justification and not one's sanctification (Eaton, who argued that finding assurance in works could easily lead to dependence on those works), 3) believers are to obey by dependence upon the Lord (Crisp), 4) believers are not under the Law, but the Law is established by the gospel (Saltmarsh).

These pastors also believed some things, such things as 1) the elect were justified before the world began (Crisp), 2) God does not see sin in believers (Eaton), 3) Christ repented, believed, and obeyed for us (Saltmarsh), which took the doctrines of election and justification too far, but even with their excesses they did not practice nor did they teach licentiousness.

By the way, Berkhof, a Reformed theologian, believed the elect were justified even before they believed, although they were unconscious of it (Berkhof, pp. 517-518)! Other Reformed theologians also speak of justification from eternity, although they refuse to subscribe to the antinomian construction of the doctrine (see Berkhof, p. 518).

IN SCOTLAND

One of the great controversies involving the charge of antinomianism occurred in Scotland. It is known as the Marrow Controversy. In 1645, Edward Fisher, a Reformed theologian, wrote *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*. The book reflected Reformed theology. It was widely read by the Puritans. The name of the controversy in Scotland is taken from the title of that book.

In 1717, a controversy arose when a Presbytery decided it was not "orthodox to teach that we must forsake sin to our coming to Christ, and instating us in covenant with God" (Bell, p. 151). For them, the issue was the unconditional freeness of God's grace.

When William Craig, a ministerial student, refused to subscribe to the position of the Presbytery on this issue, the Presbytery refused to license him. He appealed to the General Assembly and the General Assembly ruled in his favor (Hall, p. 242). The General Assembly said that statement was "unsound and most detestable" (Bell, p. 151). That decision divided the church into two groups: the evangelicals (salvation is free and unconditional) and the legalists (the conditions of salvation are repentance, faith, and obedience).

Responding to that decision, Ralph Erskine, an evangelical, proclaimed from his pulpit, "Some speak of forsaking sin, to and before coming to Christ, but never would you forsake sin evangelistically until once Christ comes to you, and you to him; when Christ comes into the temple, he drives out all the buyers and sellers; therefore let him in and he will make the house clean" (Bell, p. 151).

In 1718, the republication of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* in Scotland caused "a mighty stir" (Bell, p. 151). Principal James Haddow (also spelled Hadow) of St. Andrews published a pamphlet entitled "The Antinomianism of the *Marrow* Detested." Haddow argued that since the atonement was only for the elect, it must only be offered to those who begin to show evidence of election, which means keeping the law. This is called neonomianism ("neo" = new + "nomos" = law); it was a new legalism. Haddow reasoned that the free offer of the gospel to everyone would depend on an Unlimited Atonement. Therefore, the *Marrow* was teaching antinomianism (against the Law) and Unlimited Atonement (Hall, p. 244).

Several pastors responded by publishing their own pamphlets. These men became known as the Marrow Men.

In 1720, the General Assembly condemned the book, prohibited its recommendation, and instructed their ministers to warn their parishioners against it. That decision, known as the Black Act, charged the book with teaching: 1) assurance of salvation is of the essence of faith, 2) Unlimited Atonement, 3) holiness is not necessary for salvation, 4) fear of punishment and hope of reward are not proper motives for Christian obedience, and 5) believers are not under the Law as a rule of life (Bell, p. 152). Hall says, in their view, that since the book taught faith alone by grace alone, it not only taught antinomianism but also universal atonement and reconciliation (Hall, p. 145)!

According to Bell, the Assembly misunderstood the *Marrow*. He says that concerning the nature of faith, the intent of the *Marrow* was to teach that salvation is "complete in Christ and not contingent upon any work or act which man must perform" (Bell, p. 152). The Assembly thought that was antinomianism! The intent of the *Marrow* was "to stress not that believers are freed from the law in all regards, but that believers are no longer under the law as a covenant of works in the same way that Adam was" (Bell, p. 153). Actually, the *Marrow* taught that the Law remained as a rule of life in the covenant of grace (Bell, p. 153).

In 1721, the twelve Marrow Men (also known as "Representers") met to respond to the Assembly's charges. Hall says they affirmed that "no one needed to obey the Law as a precondition to inclusion in the covenant of grace. Indeed, since man had broken the covenant of works (citing the Westminster Confession, 19:6), he was unable, now fallen, to render any obedience to the Law prior to entrance into the covenant of grace, which is (following regeneration) by faith alone—faith itself being a gift. Moreover, the "Representers" argued that obedience to the Law as a guide-for-living is, in the order of sequence, *after* entrance into the covenant of grace" (Hall, p. 245, italics his). They declared that they did not believe the *Marrow* taught Unlimited Atonement and they concluded that "the biblical offer of the gospel was a warrant to believe and therefore should be preached to everyone without discrimination" (Hall, p. 246).

In 1722, when the twelve Marrow Men petitioned the General Assembly to repeal the Black Act, it was reaffirmed. The assembly also challenged the Representers with a series of 12 "queries" regarding their position. In response, the Marrow Men said that justification is not based on any preconditioning or works (Hall, p. 247). They also affirmed that, on the one hand, the gospel was to be offered to all men, but on the other hand, they rejected universal atonement (Unlimited Atonement) and universal salvation (Hall p. 248). They defended the free offer of declaring the gospel to all and, at the same time, held to election (Hall, p. 249).

The controversy led to a schism. In the 1730s, the Associate Presbytery was formed.

A position that was considered standard Reformed orthodoxy by members of the Westminster Assembly in 1645 had become "antinomian" by the Church of Scotland!

Thomas Boston

His Life Thomas Boston (1677-1732) was the leader of the "Marrow Men." He was educated at Edinburgh University, where he received an M.A. (1694). He became the pastor of a small parish in Simpkin (1699). In 1704, while visiting a member of his flock, he found Fisher's book *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*. In 1707, Boston became the pastor at Ettrick, where he remained until his death.

His Theology Boston was a Calvinist. He believed that from all eternity, God elected certain individuals to eternal life. This election was based on God's grace, not on the decree to save all who believe and persevere. He believed in Limited Atonement (Bell, p. 154). He believed that pastors should preach the Law to make people aware of their miserable

state. On the one hand, he affirmed that repentance follows faith and is not a requirement for obtaining salvation, but on the other hand, he placed the Law prior to the gospel and insisted that the law faith is a practical necessity for having a good gospel faith, and, thus, repentance is at least logically prior to faith (Bell, p. 158). Like Calvin, Boston speaks of faith as knowledge. For him, true faith does not look upon Christ as the Savior of mankind in general but is a true persuasion that Christ's righteousness is sufficient to save the believer in particular (Bell, p. 158).

Bell says Boston and the Marrow Men "were known for their insistence that assurance is of the essence of faith and that this assurance is grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ. For this reason, Boston insisted that Christ must be understood as the Savior of the world and that the gospel offer of Christ extends to the whole of humanity without exception. What he failed to realize, however, is that this universal offer of Christ and the grounds of assurance in Christ are removed if, as Boston held, Christ died only for the elect" (Bell, p. 160).

At the same time, Boston believed that any and all may come "with assurance that whoever of them will employ him to be saved them, he shall be saved." In his view, only the elect will apply for salvation. As for assurance, Boston opted for the practice of self-examination, saying, "If their works be good, and their obedience true, thereby they will come to a certain knowledge that they were elected" (Bell, p. 154)

Focusing on John 3:16, Boston maintained that if the gospel is not freely offered to all purely on the basis of grace alone through faith alone, then the gospel presentation 'would be of no more value than a crier's offering the King's pardon to one who was not comprehended in it" (Hall, p. 255).

As for assurance, Boston wrote, "There is an assurance in the nature of faith, whereby the believing person is sure of the truth of the doctrine of the gospel, and that with respect to him in particular" (Boston, cited by Bell, p. 159). In other words, assurance is of the essence of faith. In fact, he said that if assurance is removed from the faith, "the very nature and essence of it has been destroyed" (Boston, cited by Bell, p. 160). Yet, with frequent references to 2 Peter 1:10, Boston commends the use of self-examination. Then he turns around and undermines the confidence that may be gain through self-examination by teaching that a hypocrite can have a counterfeit form of every grace that a believer can have! To further complicate matters, "Saints may lose the evidence of grace so that they cannot discern it in themselves" (Boston, Bell, p. 160).

Ebenezer Erskine

His Life Ebenezer Erskine (1680-1754) was educated at Edinburgh University, graduating with an M.A. in 1697. He was a popular preacher with a congregation of over 2000 people. He also served as professor of divinity for the Associate Burgher Synod.

His theology Erskine believed in double predestination (God elects some and condemns others). He believed in Limited Atonement. "However, like Boston, he recognizes the universal elements in the teaching of the Scripture, and so contends for a Christ who is 'an

universal Savior in the offer of the gospel.' All mankind have a warrant to embrace Christ as their Savior. If anyone perishes, therefore, it is due to their unbelief" (Bell, p. 162). Erskine believed that faith was a gift of God. For him, faith is not merely trust in a general notion of reconciliation but trust that this reconciliation is "true to me in particular" (Erskine, cited by Bell, p. 166).

As for assurance, like Boston, he believed that assurance and certainty is in the very essence of faith, but he also believed that not all Christians experienced the same degree of certainty and the same believer may oscillate between strong and weak faith (Bell, p. 166). Yet he exhorts believers to try their faith by examining themselves for signs and evidences of sanctification. He insists that no one may conclude their salvation "until they've examined the matter at the bar of the word, and upon trial have found such marks of grace as warrant them to draw such a conclusion" (Erskine, Bell, pp. 166-167). He taught that the primary foundation of assurance is Jesus Christ and that the secondary confirmation is the fruits of faith. "Proper examination is conducted to determine whether one is trusting in Christ and not seeking another foundation for faith" (Bell, p. 168).

Bell observes, "Boston and Erskine contend for the universal offer of Christ in the gospel, for such an offer is necessary to provide the basis for assurance. Not only do the Marrow Men's contemporary Federalists deny this universal offer, but they also deny that a basis for assurance of faith is necessary; according to them, assurance is not the essence of faith." (Bell, p. 168). He adds that for the Federalists, "The doctrine of Limited Atonement removes the possibility of a universal offer of Christ in the gospel, and also removed the basis for assurance of salvation."

Hall sums up the situation well when he says, "The Marrow men battled on two fronts: against the legalism of the Neonomians, who determined that man could in his post-fallen condition still do some works of preconditions to coming to Christ; and, secondly, against those whose view of predestination precluded a free offer of the gospel. Against the legalists who failed to consider man's total depravity and who posited man's ability to do good works as preparatory toward faith in Christ, the Marrow Men, as shown above, denied man's ability in any manner to satisfy the covenant's works as a precondition for believing in Christ. Moreover, in order to emphasize the 'freeness' of the offer, they everywhere declared the Reformation 'grace alone through faith alone' principle" (Hall, p. 253).

Hall also puts the position of the opponents of the Marrow Men into clear focus by quoting Dr. Sinclair B. Ferguson, a Calvinist and seminary professor, who says the opposition's position can be summarized in the form of a syllogism:

Major premise:	The grace of God saves the elect only.
Minor premise:	The elect are known by their forsaking sin.
Conclusion:	The grace of God is given to those who forsake sin.

Summary: In 18th century Scotland, when Calvinists taught that since the atonement was only for the elect, it must only be offered to those who are beginning to show their election by keeping the Law, pastors, who were Calvinists known as the Marrow Men,

denied that people had to keep the Law as evidence of election, before they got saved and as a result were charged with antinomianism.

The Marrow Men were Calvinists, who believed in double predestination, Limited Atonement, and that people should examine themselves for evidence of sanctification as a secondary basis of assurance.

The Marrow Men believed that the gospel should be offered to everyone and that assurance was the essence of faith.

IN AMERICA

The pilgrims came to America by boat. So did antinomianism. The English version of antinomianism came to Boston by boat.

The Boston Controversy

The People The main players in the drama called the "Antinomian Controversy," which more recently has been called the "Free Grace Controversy," were John Cotton, Anne Hutchinson, Henry Vane, and John Wheelwright. Cotton and Wheelwright were pastors, Vane was Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and Hutchinson was a member of the Boston Church.

It all started in England. Cotton preached that grace was the only means of salvation and that the Holy Spirit dwells in the justified person. He put less emphasis on man's struggle to prepare for God's salvation (by use of the Law), and more emphasis on the transformation at the moment of conversion "in which mortal man was infused with a divine grace." Cotton's theology was largely inspired by the English Puritan Richard Sibbes, but his basic tenets were from John Calvin. At one point, he wrote, "I have read the fathers, and the schoolmen and Calvin too, but I find that he that has Calvin has them all." Cotton saw more conversions during his first six months in the pastorate than there had been the previous year.

Anne Hutchinson (1591–1643) accepted Cotton's views. When Cotton moved to Boston, Hutchinson and her family, including her husband and 10 of their 11 surviving children, followed him. In Boston, Hutchinson held discussions on the weekly sermons in her home. These meetings were attended by about sixty people, including Henry Vane, who was Governor of the colony. During the meetings, she criticized the colony's ministers for preaching a covenant of works.

As a teenager, Henry Vane had an intense spiritual experience that left him confident of his salvation. Like John Cotton, Wheelwright, Hutchinson's brother-in-law, preached a message of man's utter dependence on God's free grace, rejecting any notion that man could affect his salvation through his own works. Wheelwright viewed a covenant of works as casting doubt on God's loving mercy.

The Controversy The ministers of the Massachusetts Bay colony preached that a moral life could provide a measure of assurance of personal election (Pyne, p. 143). For Cotton, assurance did not depend on one's outward behavior (Pyne, p. 143). Assurance came when the Holy Spirit gave an individual "clear sight of his justification in a free promise of grace in Christ" (Cotton, cited by Pyne, p. 146). It was based "upon the unconditional promise of God and upon Christ's unconditional union with the person (Cotton, cited by Pyne, p. 146). Pyne explains, "The elders saw this as dangerously emotional and subjective. For them, sanctification seemed to be a much more objective test of justification. From

Cotton's perspective, however, it was the sanctification test that seemed overly subjective" (Pyne, p. 146).

In 1636, the ministers of Boston held a meeting with Cotton, Wheelwright, and Hutchinson. The meeting did not resolve the issue. Tensions rose in the colony. To ease the situation, a day of fasting and repentance was called on January 19, 1637. Cotton invited Wheelwright to speak at the services that day. Wheelwright's sermon created an uproar. In March, Wheelwright was accused of contempt and sedition.

What was the problem? In his account of the Antinomian Controversy, John Winthrop, the first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, called the Free Grace advocates Anabaptists and Familists (Winthrop, *Short Story*). In his journal, he wrote, "One Mrs. Hutchinson, a member of the church at Boston, a woman of a ready wit and a bold spirit, brought over with her two dangerous errors: 1. That the person of the Holy Ghost dwells in a justified person. 2. That no sanctification ('works') can help to evidence to us our justification."

The Consequences The controversy had political ramifications. In May 1637, the free grace advocate Vane lost the gubernatorial race and the Boston magistrates who supported Hutchinson and Wheelwright were voted out of office. Vane sailed to England, never to return.

In November, Wheelwright was tried. The court found him guilty of troubling the civil peace, of holding corrupt and dangerous opinions, and of contemptuous behavior toward the magistrates. He was banished from the colony and given two weeks to depart.

Anne Hutchinson was brought to trial. During her trial, she claimed divine inspiration was the source of her knowledge and prophesied ruin upon the colony. She was banished from the colony but held in detention until March 1638, when she was excommunicated. Her departure from the colony brought the controversy to a close.

Cotton continued to minister in Boston until his death.

Plymouth Brethren

The Plymouth Brethren began in Dublin, Ireland, in 1827-28, spread to England and Europe, and have had influence and impact worldwide. They could be considered under Ireland or England, but they are placed under this section on America because an American professor wrote the charge that Plymouth Brethren are antinomian. Daniel Steele, a professor of theology at Boston University, wrote *Antinomianism Revived, or the Theology of the so-called Plymouth Brethren*. Steele was a Methodist who believed in the Methodist doctrine of Christian perfection.

Steele criticized the Plymouth Brethren because they taught that believers are perfect in Christ (in Christ, they have imputed righteousness, Steele, p. 32) and yet still have a sinful nature (Steele, p. 26). He acknowledges that some who teach this doctrine do live in harmony with the "purest ethical precepts of Christ" (Steele, p. 28), but quickly adds, "Men generally live below their creeds; few rise above them" (Steele, p. 28).

Steele says, “In short, the creed of the Antinomian is this: I was justified when Christ died, and my faith is simply a waking up to the fact that I’ve always been saved a realization of what was done before I had any being; that a believer is not bound to mourn for sin, because it was pardoned before it was committed and pardoned sin is no sin; that God does not see sin in believers, however great sins they commit; the God’s laying our iniquities upon Christ, he becomes as completely sinful as I and I as completely righteous as Christ” (Steele, p. 35). He says such a position is “a paid-up, non-forfeitable, eternal life insurance policy” (Steele, p. 35).

Steele thinks that teaching believers they are not under the Law is an excuse for licentiousness (Steele, p. 38). He chides the Anabaptists for saying they are “complete in Christ and absolutely sure of salvation by reason of their standing in Him” (Steele, pp. 44-45). He believes that people are “justified in the day of judgment only on the testimony of faith-produced works” (Steele, p. 45), yet he criticizes Calvin for laying the foundation of antinomianism within Calvinism by teaching the “unguarded doctrine of absolute decrees, and of the necessary, final salvation of backsliding believers” (Steele, p. 46). He denounces Agricola for developing an extreme system that is subversive to Christian morals (Steele, p. 47). He condemns Crisp, saying he taught that “the sins of the elect are so imputed to Christ, as that, though He did not commit them, yet they actually became His transgression and ceased to be theirs” and “Christ’s righteousness is so imputed to the elect, that they, ceasing to be sinners, are as righteous as He was, and all He was” (Steele, p. 48). One of his many complaints against the Plymouth Brethren is that they teach, “The first momentary act of faith renders the Atonement eternally available and without any further condition infallibly secures eternal life” (Steele, p. 58).

Steele has other numerous criticisms of Plymouth Brethren’s teaching, including believers are not under the Law, the flesh remains sinful, and on the cross, Jesus became sin. (Steele says, “We indignantly repudiated the monstrous idea that Jesus on the cross was a sinner overwhelmed with the bolt of the Father’s personal wrath. What we do affirm is that his suffering and death were in no sense a punishment, but a substitute for punishment, answering the same end, the conservation of God’s moral government and the vindication of His holy character while He pardons penitent believers,” Steele, pp. 124-125). Steele also criticized the Plymouth Brethren’s teaching on Limited Atonement, Unconditional Election, Eternal Security, and their view of eschatology (of his 14 chapters on Plymouth Brethren, 8 are on eschatology; see pages 162-266).

Dispensationalism

The Accusation There are several issues involved in the charge that Dispensationalism is antinomian, such as the relationship of assurance to faith and assurance to sanctification. There are differences of opinion among dispensationalists concerning some of these issues, but the one issue on which there is agreement, and the issue that is often used to support the charge of antinomianism, is the teaching of Dispensationalism that believers today are not under the Mosaic Law.

The Answer Dispensationalists teach that believers are not under the Law of Moses (Rom. 6:14), but they insist that does not make believers lawless because they are under the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2), which is the royal law of love (Jas. 2:8). Furthermore, those who live by the law of love fulfill "all the law" (Gal. 5:14). As Paul explains, "Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:10).

Summary: In 17th-century Boston, some were accused of antinomianism because they believed people who were justified had received the Holy Spirit and assurance of salvation did not depend on one's outward behavior; rather, the Holy Spirit gave people assurance of salvation. Plymouth Brethren and Dispensationalists have been accused of antinomianism primarily because they teach that believers are not under the Mosaic Law.

CONCLUSION

The subject of antinomianism is cluttered with confusion because it has been used in a wide variety of ways. It has been defined in different ways and people have been accused of it for different reasons. To clarify the confusion, each of these issues needs to be examined.

Definitions

No Moral Law Antinomianism is often defined as the belief that Christians do not have to obey *any moral law*. There have been some groups in church history, such as some of the Gnostics, who taught that, but those groups were not Christians in the biblical sense of the term.

Leads to Lawlessness It would be more accurate to say that *Christians* have been accused of antinomianism because, in the opinion of those who opposed them, their *doctrine* leads to licentiousness. In other words, this is more of a doctrinal issue than a practical issue. Christians accused of antinomianism have lived moral lives.

Granted, some Christians who have been accused of antinomianism have *fallen* into sin, but that is true of people holding to every theological position. The issue is not that antinomians teach *it is permissible for believers to live in sin*. The accusation against antinomians is that what they teach *leads to lawlessness*, which, as we have seen, is simply not the case.

If antinomianism is defined as endorsing lawlessness or a license to sin, it is inappropriately applied to Christians who believe in what was been called "doctrinal" antinomianism. Sell says, "It is necessary when considering antinomianism to bear in mind the distinction between its doctrinal and its practical varieties. The vast majority of those who tended towards antinomianism occupied the former class." He goes on to say, "It is, in fact, most difficult to find instances of practical antinomianism, partly because records of ecclesiastical discipline are few and far between" (Sell, p. 46).

Issues

Christians who have been accused of "doctrinal" antinomianism have been charged with several different issues.

Evangelism Some Christians have been accused of antinomianism because they believe that it was not necessary to *preach the Law* so people felt the terror of the Law before being converted. For example, Agricola taught that people were convicted of their sins when they understood the wrath of God being poured out on His Son. Some Christians have been accused of antinomianism because they did not believe that was necessary to *obey the Law* before conversion as evidence of election (Marrow Men).

Justification Some Christians have been accused of antinomianism because they preached that justification was by faith alone and it was absolutely free. This gives the impression that the justified can live lawless lives. To all that has been written in this material could be added what Charles Finney wrote, "Those who hold that justification by imputed righteousness is a forensic proceeding, take a view of final or ultimate justification, according with their view of the nature of the transaction. With them, faith receives an imputed righteousness, and a judicial justification. The first act of faith, according to them, introduces the sinner into this relation, and obtains for him a perpetual justification. They maintain that after this first act of faith it is impossible for the sinner to come into condemnation, that, being once justified, he is always thereafter justified, whatever he may do. Now, this is certainly another gospel from the one I am inculcating. I object to this view of justification that it is *antinomianism*" (Finney, pp. 328-329, italics his)

Assurance The doctrine that assurance is the essence of faith and, therefore, people can know they are saved the moment they have faith has brought the charge of antinomianism based on the assumption that if they believe that eternal life is guaranteed, they can live as they wish.

Sanctification Some Christians have been accused of antinomianism because they have taught that believers are not under the Law. The assumption is that if believers are not under the Mosic Law, they are lawless.

Evaluation

Evangelism Is it mandatory to preach the Law in the process of leading people to Christ? Jesus used the Mosaic Law when He was talking to the Rich Young Ruler, but He did not use the Mosaic Law when talking to Nicodemus. In Acts, the apostles did not use the Mosaic Law in evangelism the way Luther was arguing needs to be done. Apparently, the Mosaic Law can be used to lead people to Christ, but it is not mandatory.

Justification The charge that the doctrine of justification by faith leads to licentiousness is as old as the apostle Paul. He called such an accusation slander (Rom. 3:8).

Assurance Just because people know for sure they have eternal life does not mean they will live godless lives. Those who have the assurance of salvation have it because of the grace of God, and the grace of God that brings salvation teaches believers to deny ungodliness and worldly lust and to live soberly, righteously, and godly (Titus 2:11-12). As Pyne points out, Eaton, Crisp, and Cotton grounded assurance in something other than one's works, but "none of these individuals directly encourage licentiousness; yet many observers argued that their theology inevitably condoned it, and rumors of lawless behavior abounded" (Pyne, p. 147). The rumors were not true; the rumors were slander.

Sanctification Christians who have taught that believers are not under the Mosaic Law have not also taught that Christians are lawless. They have insisted that believers in Jesus Christ are under the Law of Christ, which is the law of love and that if a person practiced love they would automatically fulfill the moral law. As Ryrie says, "antinomianism is

sometimes equated with Christian liberty, a wrong equation" (Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, p. 230).

Summary: Christians who have been accused of antinomianism have not taught that Christians can live lawless lives, nor what they have taught about evangelism, justification, assurance, and sanctification leads to lawless living, if what they taught is properly understood.

Other cases of "antinomianism" could be cited. Richard Baxter (1615-1691) accused John Owen (1616-1683) of antinomianism and Owen returned the favor by warning about Baxter's neonomianism. The word "neonomianism" comes from two Greek words ("new" + "law"). In theology, it is the doctrine that the new Law is the requirements of repentance, faith, and obedience that are necessary for salvation. The opponents, often called antinomians, charge that neonomianism is salvation by works, that is, people are not saved by Christ, but by their obedience to Christ through faith and repentance. Richard Baxter also charged Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) with antinomianism.

The cases explained here are the major ones and cover the issues involved. The point is when hearing or using the word "antinomian," make sure it is properly defined. While it is true that the root meaning of the word is "against the law," theologically it does not necessarily mean nor does it necessarily lead to lawlessness. The same is true when speaking about "New York." It needs to be defined. Is it a reference to the city or the state? While it is true that some citizens of the city are lawless, it does not necessarily follow that just because people are New Yorkers, they are lawless.

In short, believers are not under the Mosaic Law; they are under the Law of Christ.

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