

**Antinomianism:
A Modern Heresy, Summarized and Refuted
by William D. Pratney
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Taken and Adapted from John Fletcher's "5 Checks to Antinomianism"
with historical comments from Rev. Robert Adam, M. A. 1823,
Walter Farquhar Hook, D.D., Vicar of Leeds, 1859,
and Rev. J. B. Marsden, M.A., 1856**

"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" James 2:14 KJV

Preface

This article is an attempt to summarize and refute antinomianism for modern readers, largely using adapted or re-presented portions of Fletcher's refutation, *"Five Checks to Antinomianism"* which *originally appeared as a series of letters*, and may be found in the four volume set, "The Works of the Reverend John Fletcher, Late Vicar of Madeley, 1835."

John Fletcher, contemporary to John Wesley—founder of the Methodists—calls Antinomians "the modern Gnostics." He says, "Once we were in immediate danger of splitting [as a ship] upon [the rock of] 'works without faith.' now we are threatened with destruction from faith 'without works.' May the merciful Keeper of Israel save us from both..." (4A)

Robert Adam said,

"I am not aware that any party of professing Christians ever called themselves Antinomians: the name was given them by Luther, as a term of reproach.

They are also sometimes called *Solifidians*, a term compounded of two Latin words; *solus*, 'alone,' and *fides*, 'faith;' because they seem to carry the doctrine of faith without works, to such lengths as to separate practical holiness from Christian faith, and injure, if not wholly destroy, every obligation to moral obedience."

"The Solifidian, or Antinomian heresy, which asserts, that nothing is required in man's salvation but faith in Christ, and which took its rise from a misunderstanding and perversion of some passages of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, was one of the first that disturbed the Christian Church; insomuch that St. Augustin says*, that not only the Epistle of St James, but likewise those of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude, were written to guard the faithful against its pernicious influences. And so many have been the heresies since the Apostolic age, in the composition of which this opinion has been a prime ingredient, that there perhaps has never yet been a time wherein the state of the Christian church was such as not to require her ministers to urge the doctrine of St. James, that 'faith without works is dead,' or to warn their people against 'turning the grace of God into lasciviousness.'" (1)

Fletcher's refutation of antinomianism cuts against modern emergences of Judaizing, while systematically delivering blow after blow to the doctrine of "a finished salvation," which appears to stem from certain aspects of Calvinism, particularly the doctrines known as "the perseverance of the saints," "unconditional election," "and "irresistible grace."

A realization of how much antinomianism has infiltrated and affected the theology of the current generation of the Church, will allow the reader to understand just how far we've strayed in our doctrine from the teachings of the scriptures, especially that of Christ and His apostles, not to mention the early Church.

Fletcher says,

"Suppose our salvation be finished, it follows, Christ has done all, and we are to do nothing. Obedience and good works are no more necessary in order to it than cutting and carrying stones are necessary to the completing of Westminster bridge. We are as perfect in Christ, as completely blameless and holy in the midst of all our sins, as ever we shall be in glory. In a word, if salvation be finished, well ordered in all things and sure, our sins cannot take any thing from it, nor our righteousness have any thing to do with it. The little flock of the elect shall be saved, nay, are fully saved now, do what they please; and the multitudes of the reprobates shall be damned, do what they can." (4B)

Introducing Antinomianism

Dr. Walter Farquhar Hook said,

"The Antinomians derive their name from ἀντί [anti], against, νόμος [nomos], law, their distinguishing tenet being, that the law is not a rule of life to believers under the gospel. The founder of the Antinomian heresy was John Agricola, a Saxon divine, a contemporary, a country-man, and at first a disciple, of Luther. He was of restless temper, and wrote against Melancthon; and having obtained a professorship at Wittemberg, he first taught Antinomianism there, about the year 1535. The Papists, in their disputes with the Protestants of that day, carried the merit of good works to an extravagant length; and this induced some of their opponents, as is too often the case, to run into the opposite extreme." "...Luther...first styled him [Agricola] and his followers Antinomians..." (2)

The Antinomian delusion makes void the law of God through a speculative and barren "faith." In John Wesley's day it was referred to as "free grace."

The Antinomian error, under pretence of exalting Christ's finished work on the cross, speaks contemptuously of obedience to God's commandments, and, failing to clearly define "The Law," presumes to make it void through a faith that *does not* work by love. Its boastful proclamation is, "We have nothing to do with the law!"

Fletcher says, "As there is but a step between high Arminianism and self-righteousness, so there is but one between high Calvinism and Antinomianism. I charge you to shun both, especially the latter." (4C)

Walter Farquhar Hook again,

"The supporters of the Popish doctrines deducing a considerable portion of the arguments on which they rested their defense from the doctrines of the old law, **Agricola**, in the height of his zeal for reformation, was encouraged by the success of his master, Luther, to attack the very foundation of their arguments, and to deny that any part of the Old Testament was intended as a rule of faith or practice to the disciples of Christ.

He **is said to have taught** that the law ought not to be proposed to the people as a rule of manners, nor used in the Church as a means of instruction; and, of course, that repentance is not to be preached from the Decalogue, but only from the gospel; that the gospel alone is to be inculcated and explained, both in the churches and the schools of learning; and **that good works do not promote our salvation, nor evil works hinder it.**

Some of his followers in England, in the seventeenth century, are said to have expressly maintained, that as the elect can not fall from grace, nor forfeit the Divine favour, the wicked actions they commit are not really sinful, nor are they to be considered as instances of their violation of the Divine law; and that, consequently, they have no occasion either to confess their sins, or to seek renewed forgiveness." (2)

"The other principal doctrines which at present [1859] bear the appellation of Antinomian, are said to be as follow:

1. That justification by faith is no more than a manifestation to us of what was done before we had a being.
2. That men ought not to doubt of their faith, or question whether they believe in Christ.
3. That by God's laying our iniquities upon Christ, and our being imputed righteous through him, he became as completely sinful as we, and we as completely righteous as Christ.
4. **That believers need not fear either their own sins or the sins of others, since neither can do them any injury.**
5. **That the new covenant is not made properly with us, but with Christ for us; and that this covenant is all of it a promise, having no conditions for us to perform; for faith, repentance, and obedience, are not conditions on our part, but on Christ's; and that he repented, believed, and obeyed for us.**
6. **That sanctification is not a proper evidence of justification—that our righteousness is nothing but the imputation of the righteousness of Christ—that a believer has no holiness in himself, but in Christ only; and that the very moment he is justified, he is wholly sanctified, and he is neither more nor less holy from that hour to the day of his death.**

Justification by a faith not necessarily productive of good works, and righteousness imputed to such a faith, are the doctrines by which the members of this denomination are chiefly distinguished." (2)

"...according to Dr. Williams, Dr. Crisp [a major 17th Century proponent of Antinomianism]'s scheme is briefly this: '...that **on the cross all the sins of the elect were transferred to Christ, and ceased ever after to be their sins**: that at the first moment of conception a title to all those decreed blessings is personally applied to the elect, and they are invested actually therein. Hence the elect have nothing to do, in order to an interest in any of those blessings, nor ought they to intend the least good to themselves in what they do: sin can do them no harm because it is none of theirs; nor can God afflict them for any sin.' (2)

Extracted propositions from Dr. Crisp's writings (originally presented by Fletcher) may be seen later on in this article under the heading, **Antinomian Crispianity**.

Defining Antinomianism

Antinomianism is any kind of doctrinal or practical opposition to God's law, which is the perfect rule of right, and the moral picture of the God of love, drawn in miniature by our Lord in these two exquisite precepts, "Thou shalt love God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself." (See Luke 10:27)

"The word Antinomianism is derived from two Greek words, anti and nomos, which signify 'against the law' and the word 'legal' [is derived] from the Latin legalis, which means 'agreeable to the law.'" "The legality contended for in these letters* is not a stumbling at Christ, and a going about to establish our own righteousness by faithless works: this sin, which the Scripture calls unbelief, I would no more countenance than murder." (4D)

*See Preface

Describing the *Opposite* of Antinomianism to Better Shed Light on What it is

"As 'the law is good, if a man use it lawfully,' so *legality* is excellent, if it be evangelical. The external respect shown by Pharisees to the law is but feigned and hypocritical legality. Pharisees are no more truly legal, than Antinomians are truly evangelical. 'Had ye believed Moses,' says Jesus to people of that stamp, 'ye would have believed me:' but in your hearts you hate his law as much as you do my Gospel." (4E)

"The evangelical legality I want to see all in love with, is a cleaving to Christ by faith which works righteousness; a 'following him as he went about doing good;' and a showing by St. James' works that we have St. Paul's faith." (4E)

"We see no less Gospel in the preface of the ten commandments, 'I am the Lord thy God,' etc, than we do legality in the middle of our Lord's sermon on the mount, 'I say, Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery in his heart.' Nevertheless, the latter 'has in all things the preeminence' over the former. For if 'the law,' shortly prefaced by the Gospel, 'came by Moses;' grace, the gracious, the full display of the Gospel, and *truth*, the true explanation and fulfilling of the law, 'came by Jesus Christ.'" (4E)

What Antinomianism Does

It gives false security to present sinners.

It allows people to call Christ "Lord! Lord!" without departing from iniquity.

It allows those "who walk after the flesh" to (falsely) believe that there is no condemnation to them on account of their profession of faith, void of the works befitting it.

It gives those under pretense of a faith that's actually feigned, false security and assurance of salvation.

Instead of producing a true, and righteous change in it's professors' hearts, it only adds fuel to the fire of their self-conceit, bitterness to their bad tempers, and allows the licentiousness in their worldly lives to continue unchallenged.

It says, **Sin is taken care of. You need not change, repent, confess nor cry out to God for mercy. Your present and future sins have already been forgiven, cleansed by the blood of Jesus.**

It removes personal responsibility from those who profess the name of Christ, and places the responsibility that God gives back on Him instead.

It (falsely) grants automatic forgiveness of sins not yet committed to those who have been accepted of Christ, (falsely) nullifying all personal responsibility to confess and repent of those sins once they have been committed, and for one to do their first works again.

It teaches that true believers can *never* fall morally or make shipwreck of their faith.

It covers all it's professors' present and future sins not repented of with a false blanket of security under the guise of being viewed by God as "in Christ," pretending to nullify all need for present and future repentance, confession of sins, and practical obedience to God.

It allows those who profess it to put Him Who bought them to an open shame with the present and continuing sin in their lives.

It boasts imputed righteousness, while maintaining the allowance of practical unrighteousness in those who profess it.

It says, **Your only part is to believe. Christ has done all the work. You need not act, but rest in your belief.**

Practically, it denies the Lord, by nullifying obedience to Him.

It grants that those who confess Christ need never labor spiritually in any way, nor in practical ways obey Him, other than merely "believing."

It says, **Christ has taken your judgment. You will not be judged for your sins.**

It denies that we will each give an account to God for the words which we have spoken, and for the works which we have done.

It ridicules the idea, and allows for the neglect of, keeping God's commandments.

It removes from the minds of those who hold to it, the responsibility of working out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

The "faith" of Antinomianism:

- engages the head, and not the heart
- works by malice and not by love (in actuality, it doesn't work at all)
- allows for disobedience to God and excuses the conscience from guilt
- rather than purifying the heart from sin, allows for the acceptance of it!

Antinomian delusions have carried many a soul down the channels of vice, and into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. (4F)

True faith (on the other hand):

- engages the heart
- works by love
- disallows disobedience to God; displays itself in obedience to God
- purifies the heart from sin

Love and good works validate ones faith presently and also on the Day of Judgment.

"...show me thy faith without thy works and I will show thee my faith by my works." James 2:18 KJV

Common Antinomian Objections to Justification by the Fruits of Faith (Love and Good Works) on the Day of Judgment (as Opposed to Justification by Faith Only)

What this section seeks to address is, following initial justification by faith in Christ, how genuine faith is validated by its fruits (love and good works), specifically on the Day of Judgment, but broadly now in this life. The point of presenting this section is to show the necessity of having the fruits of faith to justification, rather than only an empty profession of it.

You could also say it like this: A person is justified (from their past sins; made righteous; forgiven by God) by their faith in Jesus Christ. But their faith is validated, shown and demonstrated by their love and good works. Apart from love, good works and obedience to God, what evidence do they have (before Christ as well as His Church) that they possess true justifying faith?

True faith works by love and is evident in good works. Antinomian thinking fights all real need to evidence true faith by love, good works and obedience.

In fighting against true faith which works by love and is evident in good works, antinomian thinking masquerades as Gospel truth under the following sentiments (seen in **bold**; each antinomian sentiment is followed by the author's refutation, each of which are largely derived from Fletcher's 2nd Check to Antinomianism: Letter 1: "The Doctrine of a Second Justification by Works Defended" [4G]):

1. I am with the apostle Paul in my belief, determined to know nothing towards justification but Christ, and him crucified.

Instead of setting aside the grace of God for the keeping of the Old Testament laws (which some of the Galatians were guilty of), we must not set aside the eternal law of God contained in the Gospel and fulfilled by love by an *empty* profession of our faith in the crucified Saviour. Empty, meaning we by actions deny the very Christ that we profess, railing at His holy

doctrine, trampling on his royal proclamations, and disregarding his authoritative word. Christ says, "By thy words shalt thou be justified;" and St. Paul declares, "Not the hearers, but the doers of the law [of Christ for New Covenant believers] shall be justified." Disregarding the commands of God laid forth in scripture in the name of "knowing nothing but Christ, and Him crucified" will no more justify us than a heathen, whose actions are the same but whose profession is different.

"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." 1 John 2:4

2. Asking people to keep God's laws is legalism. It robs God's children of their glorious liberty in Christ, binds Moses' burden to their free shoulders, and forces them to wear a yoke of bondage from which they've been set free.

The heavy yoke of the circumcision and ceremonial bondage, with which the Galatians once entangled themselves, must never be confused with the easy yoke of Jesus Christ, which He asks us to take to ourselves. The former required blood, and was strict and exacting; the latter requires love, and is light and bearable. Christ invites us to take His yoke upon ourselves, in order that we might learn what He is truly like - meek and humble in heart. Only then, after having received His yoke, will we find true rest for our souls. They are sons of Belial who shake off the Lord's yoke; and though they should boast of their election as much as the Jews did, Christ himself will say concerning them, "...these enemies of Mine, that did not want Me as their ruler [that refused My yoke], bring them here, and put them to death before Me!" (See Luke 19:27) So inexpressibly dreadful is the end of lawless liberty!

The spirit of Antinomianism represents God's requirements on persons lives as *already* fulfilled and obeyed *for* them *by* Christ, and the keeping of God's comandments as "a yoke of bondage."

But the dutiful children of God have come to know these things are not so: they fulfill the law of Christ through:

1. loving obedience to His commandments
2. submission to His requirements on their persons
3. serving one another

Their hearts are never so free as when they run the way of his commandments, and by bearing one another's burdens fulfill the law of Christ. Keep them from obedience, and you keep them "in the snare of the devil," promising liberty to others, while "they themselves are the servants of corruption."

"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments." 1 John 2:3

"And this is love, that we walk after his commandments." 2 John 1:6

"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." 1 John 5:3

3. Your doctrine is the damnable error of the Galatians, who madly left Mount Zion for Mount Sinai, made Christ the Alpha, and not the Omega, and after "having begun in the Spirit" would be "made perfect by the flesh." This is the other Gospel which St. Paul thought so diametrically contrary to his own, that he wished that the teachers of it, though they were "angels of God," might even be "accursed" and "castrate themselves."

You are under a capital mistake: St. Paul could never be so wild as to curse himself, anathematize St. James, and wish the Messiah to be castrated: for he himself taught the Romans, that 'the doers of the law shall be justified.' St. James evidently maintains a justification by works; and our Lord expressly says, 'By thy words thou shalt be justified.'

Again: the apostle, if he had foreseen how his Epistle to the Galatians would be abused to Antinomian purposes, gives us in it the most powerful antidotes against that poison.

Take three instances.

1. *He exhorts his fallen converts to the fulfilling of all the law:*

"By love serve one another," says he, "for all the law is fulfilled in this one word, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." (Galatians 5:13-14) How different is this doctrine from the bold Antinomian cry, "We have nothing to do with the law!"

2. *He warns them and reminds them not to practice the works of the flesh:*

"I tell you before, as I have told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:19-21) He gives quite a large list of examples, just in case anyone is unclear as to what the "works of the flesh" are: fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, wrath, contention, dissent, heresy, envy, drunkenness, revelling, "and things like these." So people that practice sinful things such as he listed will not be justified in the day of judgment, or, which is the same thing, "shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

"How different a Gospel is this from that which insinuates, 'impenitent adulterers may be dear children of God, even while such, and in a very safe state, and quite sure of glory!'" (4G)

3. *He reminds them that the law of sowing and reaping applies to their actions, warning them against deception:*

"Don't be deceived!" "the person* who sows to the flesh shall reap ruin from the flesh, but the person who sows to the Spirit shall reap life everlasting from the Spirit." (see Galatians 6:7-8)

* note that it is the person (not CHRIST) that both sows and reaps a harvest from the same.

This epistle, then, can not be used to:

1. Disregard the necessity for love and good works
2. Denigrate loving action and practical service as necessary for fulfilling the law of God
3. Justify those that practice the works of the flesh
4. Say that the Gospel is opposed to the law of God

"What *doth* it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" James 2:14

4. I am persuaded you are in the dreadful heresy of the Galatians; for they were, like you, for "justification by the works of the law;" and St. Paul resolutely maintained against them the fundamental doctrine of justification by faith.

If you once read over the Epistle to the Galatians without prejudice, and without comment, you will see, that

1. They had returned to the "beggarly elements" of the law of Moses, by superstitiously starting again to "observe days, months, times, and years."

2. Imagining they "could not be saved except they were circumcised," they submitted even to that grievous and bloody injunction.

3. Exact in their useless ceremonies, and fondly hoping to be justified by their partial observance of Moses' law, they almost forgot the merits of Christ, and openly trampled upon his law, and "walked after the flesh."

In short, they trusted partly in the merit of their superstitious performances, and partly in Christ's merits; and on this preposterous foundation they "built the hay" of Jewish ceremonies, and "the stubble" of fleshly lusts. With great propriety, therefore, the apostle called them back, with sharpness, to the only sure foundation, the merits of Jesus Christ; and wanted them to "build upon this foundation gold, silver and precious stones," all the works of piety and mercy that spring from "faith working by love."

Furthermore, "the law" being spoken of was not just any unspecified law...it was not, for instance the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2), nor the law of the land (1 Peter 2:13-14), but it was the law of Moses (the Old Covenant).

"Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous." 1 John 3:7

5. Your Pharisaic doctrine flatly contradicts the Gospel summed up by our Lord, "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:16) Here is not one word about works. All turns upon faith.

"We steadily assert, as our Lord, that 'he who believeth,' or 'endureth unto the end believing,' (for the word implies both the reality and the continuance of the action,) 'shall infallibly be saved;' because faith, which continues living, 'works' to the last 'by love' and good works, which will infallibly justify us in the day of judgment." (4G)

For when faith is no more, love and good works will evidence:

1. That we were grafted into Christ by true faith
 2. That we did not make shipwreck of the faith; that we were not taken away as branches in him which did not bear fruit, but abode fruitful branches in the true Vine.
 3. That we are still in him by HOLY LOVE, the precious and eternal fruit of true persevering faith.
- (John 15:1-2, 4-6; Romans 11:18-22; Revelation 14:13 ["...and their works do follow them."])

It is worthwhile to note that we are brought to love and good works by faith. Faith is, therefore, the starting point, and not the end of our lives in God.

6. Your doctrine exalts man, and by giving him room to boast, robs Christ of the glory of his grace. "The top stone" is no more "brought forth with shouting, Grace! Grace!" but, Works! Works! "unto it!" And the burden of the song in heaven will be, Salvation to our works! and no more, Salvation to the Lamb!

I no less approve your godly jealousy, than I wonder at your groundless fears. To calm them, permit me to point out that this doctrine is Christ's, who would not be so unwise as to side with our self-righteous pride, and teach us to rob him of his own glory.

"The love and good works by which we shall be justified in the day of judgment, are the fruits of faith...Christ is the great object of faith, [and] the Holy Ghost, called the Spirit of faith, the power of believing, the means, opportunities, and will to use that power, are all the rich presents of God's free grace. All our sins, together with the imperfections of our works, are mercifully forgiven through the blood and righteousness of Christ: our persons and services are graciously accepted merely for his sake, and through his merits: and if rewards are granted us according to the fruits of righteousness we bear, it is...because the meritorious sap of the Root of David produces those fruits, and the meritorious beams of the Sun of righteousness ripen them." (4G)

Thus you see, that, which ever way you look at our justification, God has all the glory of it, but that of turning moral agents into mere machines, God does no more claim than you do that of turning your servants into puppets. If faith on earth gives Christ the glory of all our salvation, you need not fear that love (a superior grace) will rob him in heaven: for 'love is not puffed up, does not seek her own, and does not behave herself unseemly' toward a beggar on earth; much less will she do so toward the Lord of glory, when she has attained the zenith of heavenly perfection.

In a nutshell, justification by faith on Judgment Day, without love and good works—the fruits of true faith—is a misnomer. Without love and good works, what proof do we have that we truly believe? On Judgment Day, when faith has ceased, without love and good works, what proof have we that we believed?

7. How will the converted thief, that did no good works, be justified by works?

In our Lord's parable of the sheep and the goats, the only difference that is noted between them, is what they did, and didn't *do*. The thief *DID* good works*, as there was time and opportunity, evidencing his faith in Christ.

"Can you suppose his inward temper was not love to God and man? Could he go into paradise without being born again? Or could he be born again and not love? Is it not said, 'He that loveth is born of God;' consequently, he that is born of God loveth?" (4G)

Does not he who "loves another fulfil all the law?" Is not "the fulfilling of the law of Christ" work enough to justify the converted thief by that law?

The Thief:

1. Rebuked the scoffer who mocked Jesus (Luke 23:40)
2. Emphasized the importance of fearing God (Luke 23:40)
3. Defended Jesus and His innocence (Luke 23:41)
4. Confessed Christ before men (Luke 23:42 [see Matthew 10:32 and Romans 10:11])
 - a. By acknowledging Jesus had a kingdom (Luke 23:42)
 - b. Thereby acknowledging His authority or lordship
5. Asked Jesus not to forget about him when He entered His kingdom, evidencing the reality of his faith in Christ (Luke 23:42)

All this was done in light of Luke 23:32-39, which reveals:

- A. He was led to Calvary and crucified with Jesus (vs 32-33), which made him privy to
- B. Christ's prayer on the cross to His Heavenly Father (vs 34)
- C. The rulers deriding Jesus as the Christ (vs 35)
- D. The Roman soldiers mocking Jesus as the King of the Jews (vs 36-37)
- E. The idea that if Jesus was the Christ, He could save him (vs 39)

* "We mean by WORKS 'the whole of our inward tempers and outward behaviour;' and how do you know the outward behaviour of the converted thief? Did not his reproofs, exhortations, prayers, patience, and resignation, evidence the liveliness of his faith, as there was time and opportunity?" (4G)

8. We have no need to focus on good works, because "the love of Christ constraineth us" to abound in every good word and work.

St. Paul, who spoke those words with more feeling than you*, thought the contrary; as well as his blessed Master, or they would never have taught a second justification by works.

* 2 Corinthians 5:10-15

If the love of Christ is always sufficient, then why do those who have tasted of Christ's love sometimes return to sin as dogs to their vomit, or mother pigs to wallowing in the mire? Why can they be guilty of idolatry, fornication, or even incest? (2 Peter 2:20-22; Revelation 2:20-23; 1 Corinthians 5:1)

"If love alone is always sufficient, why did our Lord work upon his disciples' hearts, by the hope of 'thrones and a kingdom,' and by the fear of a 'worm that dieth not, and a fire that is not quenched?' Why does the apostle stir up believers to 'serve the Lord with godly fear,' by the consideration that 'he is a consuming fire?' Illustrating his assertion by this awful warning, 'If they (Korah and his company) escaped not,' but were consumed by fire from heaven, because they 'refused him (Moses) that spake on earth; much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven!' Why did St. Paul himself, who, no doubt, understood the Gospel as well [just as good] as [antinomian professors], 'run a race for an incorruptible crown, and keep his body under, LEST he himself should be a castaway?'" (4G)

Luke 22:29-30; Mark 9:43-48; Hebrews 12:28-29, 25 (Numbers 16:1-35); 1 Corinthians 9:27

Paul writes that in the "day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" God "will render to every man according to his deeds:" to them that continue "in well doing..." (here is the true perseverance of the saints!) "eternal life!" But "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil," and "glory, honor, and peace, to every man who worketh good...For there is no respect of persons with God." (Romans 2:5-11)

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things *done* in *his* body," not according to that he hath believed, whether it be true or false, but "according to that he hath done, whether *it be* good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..." (2 Corinthians 5:10-11)

Christ taught, "...they that have done good, [shall come forth] unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, [shall come forth] unto the resurrection of damnation." (John 5:29) "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." (Matthew 16:27)

"...the tree is known by *his* fruit. ...out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. (Matthew 12:33-37) Therefore our words are like works in that we will be justified or condemned by them in the day of judgment.

Both Paul and Christ emphasized the value of our good works in light of judgment day.

9. It is the enemies of the Gospel of grace—the Pharisees—that preach the legal doctrine of justification by works in the day of judgment.

And what do you imply by that? That the doctrine is false? If the inference be just, it will follow there is neither heaven nor hell; for the Pharisees publicly maintain the existence of both.

Christ said in Matthew 23:2-3, "the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, *that* observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not." His issue was not with their telling people to keep Moses' law. The law of Moses was a law essentially that Christ had ordained. For He is the same One that gave Moses the ten commandments, and the rest of the laws in the first place. And He is the same, "yesterday, today, and forever." His issue was not with their telling people to keep the law of Moses. His issue was with their hypocrisy.

It wasn't that what they were saying was wrong, it's that they weren't actually keeping the law that they were teaching! At least, not in it's most important aspects. They were paying great attention to the less important parts of it, but completely neglecting the most important parts - justice, mercy and faith. (Matthew 23:23)

The Pharisees believed that obedience to the law was necessary for justification, but they failed to attain to its righteousness, because they "sought it not by faith," and to abide by the spirit of it, which upheld justice, mercy, and faith. They had an outward form of the law, but failed to practice it as it was intended. They failed, not in their preaching of the law, but in their outworking of it. Thus, Christ did *not* contest what they taught or preached (in this context), but their *hypocrisy* in failing to practice it; they failed to practice what they preached. HOWEVER, as participants of the *New Covenant*, and NOT of the Old, we emphasize not "the law of Moses," but that which preceded and fulfills it, the law of God.*

A building analogy of salvation

The Pharisees focus largely on interpretations and application of Mosaic law, sometimes to the neglect of true justice, mercy and God's love. They are only concerned with the details of carrying out obedience to God's laws. i.e. law and works

Ministers that preach a finished salvation ("free grace preachers," and otherwise called) focus largely on "justification by faith" and "being in Christ", sometimes to the point of discarding the necessity for good works and obedience to God's laws. They are concerned almost exclusively with grace and faith.

If our salvation be compared to a building, the Pharisees are concerned with the roof, and the free grace preachers the foundation. Just as a roof, unsupported by solid walls, is unstable and can crush a person to death, so a foundation, without a roof is not much better than the open air. In fact, you wouldn't really consider it a building, just the beginning of one. You can camp out on it, but it won't protect you from the threatening elements. A salvation with only a foundation, like a building, is far from complete. Therefore, 'wise master builders,' like St. Paul, must be concerned with having both in their proper places. Like him, when the foundation is well laid, 'leaving the first principles of the doctrine of Christ,' they 'go on to perfection;' nor forget, as they work out their salvation, to remember that it is grace that covers the whole building, from the very foundation upon which it rests, to the uppermost part—the chief corner stone—which binds the solid arch together.

* "...God's law...is the perfect rule of right, and the moral picture of the God of love, drawn in miniature by our Lord in these two exquisite precepts, 'Thou shalt love God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself.'" (4G)

10. Were I to accept the doctrine of justification by love and good works on Judgment Day, the majority of Christians would rise against me, and my dearest Christian friends would fear me as as a blind legalist and pity me as an unawakened Pharisee.

Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad when all men (the godly not excepted) shall say all manner of evil of you falsely for Christ's sake, for preferring Christ's holy doctrine to the loose tenets of antinomianism. And know that it is as great an honor to be called *legalistic* by modern, popular Christians for Christ's sake, as it was in John Wesley's day to be branded with the name *Methodist* by the sots who gloried in their shame.

So, What Does the *Opposite* of Antinomianism Look Like?

An acknowledging of and submitting to the holy requirements of God. A loving God with all one's heart, mind, soul, and strength, and loving one's neighbor as oneself. A working of no ill towards one's neighbor. An outward conduct guided by inward obedience to God's laws and truth. It is a true faith which works by love and is evident in good works.

For the sinner, it begins by a humble acknowledgment of one's genuine need for a Savior, and recognizing Christ Jesus as that One. It continues by demonstrating its faith in genuine obedience to Christ's Gospel, namely a complete repenting of and forsaking of one's sins, a turning in faith to God based on His demonstrated love in Christ, and a continuation in obedience to Him, including submission to baptism and love for the brethren.

It results in a heart and life marked by:

love for God

love for others

love for oneself

good fruit (love, joy, peace, etc.)

good works (examples: lodging strangers, washing saints' feet, relieving the afflicted, etc. [See 1 Timothy 5:10])

Objections to the Necessity of Living According to God's Law

"Should it be objected, that St. Paul says to the Galatians, 'I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live to God;' and to the Romans, 'Ye are become dead to the law by the body of Christ:' I answer, in the apostle's days, that expression, the law, frequently meant 'the whole Mosaic dispensation;' and in that sense every believer is dead to it, dead to all that Christ has not adopted." (4H)

For,

1. He is dead to the Levitical law, "Christ having abolished in His flesh" "the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances;" "Touch not; taste not; handle not."

2. He is dead to the ceremonial law, which was only "a shadow of good things to come," a typical representation of Christ and the blessings flowing from his sacrifice.

3. He is dead to the curse attending his past violations of the moral law; for "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."

4. And lastly, he is dead to the hopes of recommending himself to God by the merit of his obedience to the moral law; for in point of merit, he is "determined not to know any thing...save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

When we are talking about God's law, we are not talking about the Law of Moses!

So, "dead to the law" means dead to the Old Covenant, and NOT dead to God's unchanging, holy requirements...God's law!

"Dead to the law" means dead to the entire way of relating to God based on the laws He gave through Moses, the "whole Mosaic dispensation;" dead to the Old Covenant (also known as the Old Testament*), the Mosaic Covenant, which was abolished** and completely "done away" with in Christ by His utter fulfillment of it.

However, all that Christ has done for us does *not exclude* the necessity of our obedience to God. Whatever He asks now of us under the New Covenant is as much a part of our relating to Him as were the things asked of Israel under the Old. Men *died* for failing to observe His laws in Moses' day. We are warned by St. Paul to remember their examples (1 Corinthians 10:5-11). Likewise, the author of Hebrews warns of the vengeance and recompense of God on those who sin willfully as partakers of the New Covenant (Hebrews 10:26-31).

*The Old Testament in this case is an alternate word to "covenant," and refers not to the scriptures which precede the Gospels, but to the testimony of God to the children of Israel, issued at Horeb and given by the hand of Moses.

**The Mosaic Covenant has been abolished (2 Corinthians 3:13; Ephesians 2:15-17). It has been replaced by a newer covenant instituted by One greater than Moses - the LORD Jesus Christ (Hebrews 8:6-10:31, 12:24; Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

Once the LORD (the One Who gave the law to Moses in the first place, and met with Him at Horeb) came Personally in the form of Jesus Christ, we got a better way to relate to God than through the law of Moses; namely, through Jesus Christ Himself.

What Antinomianism Looks Like, Actually

It allows people to be "in Christ" WITHOUT being new creatures in Him, and "new creatures" WITHOUT casting "old things" away. It allows them to be God's children WITHOUT God's image; and "born of the Spirit" WITHOUT "the fruits of the Spirit."

It makes men believe, that though adultery and murder are damning sins in the unconverted, that they are but spots of God's children in favored Christians: that God is the most partial of all judges; some being accursed to the pit or hell for breaking the law in the most trifling points; while others, who actually break it in the most flagrant instances, are richly "blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places" and that, while God beholds "no iniquity in Jacob, no perverseness in Israel," he sees nothing but odious sins in Ishmael, and devilish wickedness in Esau.

Obedience to God and Working Out One's Own Salvation

Antinomians speak of obedience and working (with regards to salvation) as if they were the mark of a legalistic spirit. Their favorite passage is when Paul and Silas' jailer asks them, "'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' And they said, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.'" But they fail to take into account the jailor's immediate actions of:

1. Washing Paul and Silas' stripes (a good work)
2. Undergoing baptism (a public display of an inward commitment to Christ)
3. Bringing them into his house (a good work)
4. Giving them something to eat (another good work)
5. Rejoicing (evidence of a heart that's full of joy - a fruit of the Spirit and evidence of the Kingdom of God)

But many will say, "But those are all actions that occurred AFTER he was saved, and BECAUSE he was saved, NOT so that he could be saved!" Well, that's true and it's not. It's true that those actions sprung out of a heart that was truly converted. Yes, he was saved before he did any of those things. But, it's not true that had he not done those things he would remain saved. Had those actions evidencing his salvation not occurred, not only would his (former) faith be proven (presently) dead/ worthless (and therefore unable to save him)*, but he would answer to Christ for it on the Day of Judgment**.

* James 2:13-26

For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

What *doth* it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?

If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be *ye* warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what *doth* it profit?

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.

But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?

And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.

Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.

Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent *them* out another way?

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

** Matthew 25:31-46

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats:

And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink?

When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee?

Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done *it* unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me.

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:

I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did *it* not to one of the least of these, ye did *it* not to me.

And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

Fletcher asks,

"Wherefore is it that we are commanded to `strive that we may enter in at the strait gate? So to run that we may obtain?' So to wrestle that we may be `able to stand?' So `to fight, that we may lay hold on eternal life?' Can you strive and run, and wrestle and fight, and all this by doing nothing? If God would save you without working, why has he given you grace, an operative principle, that you might work? He might as well save you without grace as without works: for that is not grace that does not put forth itself in working. God, rather than we shall not work, will set us at work. He gives and promises assistance, only that we might work out our own salvation. We are not sufficient to think any thing: What then? Must we therefore sit still? `No,' says the apostle: for God, who finds us employment will also find us strength. `Our sufficiency is of God.'" (41)

You may say, "But I thought all I had to do was believe!" Our faith is proven real by our actions. Only living faith—belief that produces good works—in the living Christ can save us. ...Even demons "believe" in God! But remember, faith without works IS DEAD! Only the kind of faith that manifests itself in doing good works can save us.

Antinomian Crispianity

The following propositions have been extracted from Dr. Tobias Crisp's works. (Dr. Crisp had been a major antinomian proponent in the Century preceding Fletcher.) Fletcher called what you're about to read, "Antinomian Crispianity." See for yourself if some of these don't sound familiar to you.

1. "Must not a believer, an elect, be reckoned to be a sinner while he does sin? No: though he does sin, yet he is not to be reckoned as a sinner; his sins are reckoned to be taken away from him. A man does sin against God; God reckons not his sin to be his; he reckons it Christ's, therefore he cannot reckon it to be his." "Every elect vessel, from the first instant of his being, is as pure in the eyes of God from the charge of sin as he shall be in glory. Though such persons do act [in] rebellion, yet the loathsomeness and hatefulness of this rebellion is laid on the back of Christ; he bears the sin, as well as the blame and shame: and God can dwell with persons that act [this way], because all the filthiness of it is translated from them upon the back of Christ." (4J)

Antinomianism denies personal responsibility with regards to a believer and their sin.

2. "There is no condition in the covenant of grace; man has no tie upon him to perform any thing whatsoever as a condition that must be observed on his part; and there is not one bond or obligation upon man to the fulfilling of his part of the covenant, or partaking of the benefits of it. There is no better way to know your portion in Christ, than, upon the general tender of the Gospel, to conclude absolutely he is yours: say, 'My part is as good as any man's:' set down thy rest here; question it not, but believe it." (4J)

Antinomianism denies practical obedience to God and the Gospel.

3. "Christ belongs to sinners as sinners; and if there be no worse than sinfulness, rebellion, and enmity in thee, he belongs to thee, as well as to any in the world." (4J)

Antinomianism denies the necessity for holiness, and portrays Christ as One soft on sin.

4. "It is a received conceit among persons that our obedience is the way to heaven; and though it be not...the cause of our reign, yet it is the way to the kingdom: but I must tell you, all this sanctification of life is not a jot the way of that justified person to heaven. To what purpose do we propose to ourselves the gaining of that by our labour and industry that is already become ours before we do one jot? Must they now labour to gain these things, as if it were referred to their well or evil walking, that as they shall walk so they shall speed? The Lord does nothing in his people upon conditions. The Lord intends not that by our obedience we shall gain something, which, in case of our failing, we shall miscarry of. While you labour to get by duties, you provoke God as much as in you lies. We must work from life, and not for life." "There is nothing you can do from whence you ought to expect any gain to yourselves." (4J)

Antinomianism denies the conditions of the Gospel, and of our salvation. It denies that obedience avails anything, and likewise dismisses disobedience as inconsequential.

5. "Love to the brethren, universal obedience, and all other inherent qualifications, are no signs by which we should judge of our state." (4J)

Antinomianism denies biblical tests of Christian authenticity.

6. "A believer may be assured of pardon as soon as he commits any sin, even adultery and murder." "God does no longer stand displeased though a believer do sin often. There is no sin that ever believers commit that can possibly do them any hurt." (4J)

Antinomianism discounts the law and wrath of God, and opens wide the flood gates to sin and immorality, along with all the hurt and consequences due to those who commit them.

7. "Therefore, as their sins cannot hurt them, so there is no cause of fear in their sins committed. Sins are but scarecrows and bugbears to fright ignorant children, but men of understanding see they are counterfeit things. Sin is dead, and there is no more terror in it than in a dead lion. If we tell believers, except they walk thus and thus holy, and do these and those good works, God will be angry with them, we abuse the Scriptures, undo what Christ has done, injure believers, and tell God lies to his face." (4J)

Antinomianism practically denies the power of sin and debases the necessity of holiness.

8. "All our righteousness is filthy, full of monstrosity, the highest kind of filthiness... God has done every thing in Christ, and taken away all things that can disturb our peace; but man will be mincing the truth, and tell you, that if you keep close to God, and refrain from sin, God will love you." (4J)

Antinomianism practically debases good works, and preaches an equal favor of God to both saint and sinner alike, thus destroying all motivation to do good, and to walk in righteousness and holiness.

9. "Christ does all his work for him as well as in him that believes. If persons are not united to Christ, and do not partake of justification before they do believe, there will be bringing to life again the covenant of works; you must of necessity press upon yourselves these terms, 'I must do, that I may have life in Christ; I must believe.' Now if there be believing first, then there is doing before living. To what purpose do we tell men of wrath and damnation? We had as good hold our tongues..." (4J)

Antinomianism practically debases the demands of the Gospel, especially those directing people to "repent" and "believe."

Walter Farquhar Hook again,

"High Calvinism, or Antinomianism, absolutely withers and destroys the consciousness of human responsibility. It confounds moral with natural impotency, forgetting that the former is a crime, the latter only a misfortune; and thus treats the man dead in trespasses and sins, as if he were already in the grave. It prophesies smooth things to the sinner going on in his transgressions, and soothes to slumber and the repose of death the souls of such as are at ease in Zion."

"In opposition to Scripture, and to every rational consideration, it contends that it is not man's duty to believe the truth of God—justifying the obvious inference, that it is not a sin to reject it. In short, its whole tendency is to produce an impression on the sinner's mind, that if he is not saved it is not his fault, but God's; that if he is condemned, it is more for the glory of the Divine Sovereignty, than as the punishment of his guilt." (2)

Conclusion

In summary, antinomianism is from the *pit of hell*. Because people prefer something other than the truth that can save them, God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will put their faith in what is false, in order that they who had no faith in what is true, but took pleasure in evil, may be judged. (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12)

Additional Notes:

"Antinomians are found, at times, in union with almost every Church, and have, in fact, never existed apart, but always in connection with some body of professing Christians. Their theory is, that Christians are free from the restraint not only of the ceremonial, but of the moral law; that God neither sees nor punishes sin in the elect; that, being clothed with the righteousness of Christ, they are, in such a sense, complete in him, that their own conduct no longer affects their position in the sight of God." (3)

Dr. Tobias Crisp, rector of Brinkworth in England, was a major proponent of Antinomianism in the 17th Century. He wrote and spoke much on the subject, and engaged in a grand debate in his day, having no less than fifty-two opponents. The Westminster Assembly of Divines are said to have discussed having his books burnt as heretical. (3)

Robert Adam said,

"...the most successful exposure of the high Calvinistic doctrines [speaking of Antinomianism] which has ever appeared is contained in Sancroft (afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury)'s '**Fur Predestinatus**:' an ironical piece..." (see "The Life of William Sancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury." Volume 2, Appendix No. 2, Pg. 175-228; AR Pg. 186-239, by George D'Oyly) Adobe Reader Pg. 161-162

Who was John Fletcher?

Born in Switzerland, Fletcher was converted in 1752 after going to England to learn English. Isaac Taylor, one of his contemporaries called him "a saint, as unearthly a being as could tread the earth at all." John Wesley, who had intended to hand over the care of the Methodist Societies to him at his death, called Fletcher "the most unblameable man I know" in America or Europe. However, Wesley outlived Fletcher. Fletcher and his wife Mary co-pastored the Anglican parish of Madeley Woods. (6) It was said that, "when the atheist philosopher Voltaire was asked who was the most Christ-like person in the modern world, he replied without hesitation, 'John Fletcher of Madeley.'" In John Wesley's funeral sermon for Fletcher, he remarked that John Fletcher was the holiest man he had ever met or expected to meet this side of eternity. (5) Fletcher became the initial systematic theologian of the Methodists. Of Fletcher it is said, "When he came to Madeley, there were no Christians; when he died, there were no sinners." (6)

If wisdom is justified by her children, and a tree is known by its fruit, history's record of John Fletcher's life on earth shows the sound, biblical wisdom of his doctrine, and the good fruit of his faith.

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* De Fide et Operibus. cav. 14.

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