

The rarely taught truth of Antinomian Salvation, instant Sanctification, and earned Rewards

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Antinomian Salvation

The word “antinomian” is a curse word of the highest degree in the church today. To be charged as an antinomian is to be branded a libertine, careless in morality and one who cheapens the precious blood of our Savior.

So why would I be a proud antinomian?

Let’s begin on the other end of the continuum, with legalism. Legalism—another dirty word in the church—is defined as believing “salvation is attained or maintained through the keeping of the law.” Since a real legalist in this sense is hard to find in the Christian world (they would be Christian in name only), let me give a more typical definition of legalism: “One who believes that sanctification is reached, at least in part,

through the keeping of the moral law.” This kind of legalist is very common.

In fact, most Baptist churches are filled with this typical legalist. Members who believe they are attaining spiritual maturity because of the many things they don't do and a few select things they faithfully do.

The problems with this kind of legalism (sanctification through obedience to a moral code) are numerous, including—

- Pride
- Self-righteousness
- Self-abasement
- Lack of real spiritual maturity
- Condemnation of others.

So what is an antinomian? Typically, such a charge is given to one who believes they may sin that grace may abound. They deny any need for moral living and throw caution to the wind.

However, the typical definition of an antinomian is not the real definition. Miriam-Webster's online dictionary says that an antinomian is “one who holds that under the gospel dispensation of grace the moral law is of no use or obligation because faith alone is necessary to salvation.”

Under this actual definition, I am antinomian...and proudly so!

Paul speaks about legalism, and he is obviously no legalist.

Romans 3:20 (NAS) ²⁰ because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight.

Paul speaks about the more “typical” legalism (obedience for sanctification), and he is still obviously no legalist.

Colossians 2:23 (NAS) ²³ These [matters of the Law] are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.

Paul also speaks of typical antinomianism, and he is no antinomian under such pretense.

Romans 6:1–2 (NAS) ¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? ² May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

Finally, Paul speaks of *actual* antinomianism.

Romans 8:1–4 (NAS) ¹ Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³ For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

What amazing grace, that Christ would fulfill the Law within us, both for salvation and sanctification! Inasmuch as I do not believe that obedience to the law can save me nor sanctify me (both coming to me as a gift of God), I am an antinomian, and proud!

Instant Sanctification

While very few Christians would be legalists in the sense of believing you can be saved by observance to the Law (they would, by definition, not be Christian), a host of Christians believe, at least in a practical sense, that it is observance of the moral law that sanctifies.

Sanctification is the work of being cleansed and made like Christ. It has most often been defined as progressive, meaning it takes place over time, and involves the efforts of the believer. I have my doubts about this understanding of sanctification, primarily because I believe that sanctification is a *miraculous* work of the Spirit, not a natural result of good works.

R.J. Rushdoony wrote an influential book entitled *Institutes of Biblical Law*. It is a book on Christian Reconstructionism (i.e.: postmillennialism), but in it he clearly speaks of sanctification as a result of fulfilling the law—

“Saint Paul attacked the law as a saving ordinance, as man’s way of salvation; he upheld the law as man’s way

of *sanctification* rather than justification.... The Law is not our means of justification or salvation, but of sanctification.... Sanctification depends on our law-keeping in mind, word, and deed.... The Law is the way of holiness, the way of sanctification.”¹

The real question is whether the work of Christ on the Cross is satisfactory for our justification, our sanctification, or both? I believe that Christ fully fulfilled the Law’s demands, both for justification and sanctification. The fruit of the Spirit (which fruit is sanctification) is a result of our conversion experience, not a condition.

So sanctification comes as a work of the Spirit in our lives, using the “washing of the water of the word” as a cleansing tool. To be sanctified, then, does not require obedience to a moral code, but the filling of the Spirit. It is a miraculous and spiritual work of grace.

So where do our good works come in? Good works are a *result* of the sanctifying work of the Spirit. As the Spirit renews our mind and makes all things new our behavior is changed. Sanctification is a work from the inside-out. Furthermore, sanctification produces the desire to achieve rewards for God’s glory through our good works.

¹ . Vol. 143: *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 143*. 1986 (571) (234). Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary.

Instant Rewards

I hear very little chatter, preaching, teaching, or discussion about heavenly rewards for the believer. Most of what I do hear carries a negative tone, such as, “I’m not motivated by rewards, I just do what I do because I love the Lord.” Though such talk has a sanctimonious feel, I wonder if it has a Biblical base.

Rewards are clearly taught in the New Testament. I believe that an understanding of rewards can motivate our walk with Jesus and our service for His coming Kingdom. I want to share four key elements to a proper understanding of rewards—

1. Rewards cannot be equated with salvation.

Very often, scripture that speaks of reward is equated with salvation. This is a frightening error, often bringing an unnecessary fear of the loss of salvation to believers who are not well-grounded in the doctrine of grace.

Get this clear: **God gives salvation.** It is freely given and freely received.

The **only** requirement for salvation is to place your faith in the saving work of Jesus Christ as Savior. Only in this understanding of salvation is there any assurance of salvation. If we think that our repentance, profession of faith, recitation of a sinner’s prayer, baptism, church membership, or Christian faithfulness are required elements of salvation, then we have

placed a works element into salvation, and the “reward” we receive would be no reward at all, “but as what is due.”

Paul makes this clear in Romans 4:4-5 as he reminds us of a clear truth—

Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.

Often, scriptures about rewards are misinterpreted to be scriptures about salvation. This leads to terrible doubts about eternal security. For example, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 that we are to “run in such a way” that we may win. The prize is an imperishable wreath. Paul concludes that even he is working to “discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”

If Paul can be disqualified from salvation, then I am afraid! But why would the one who proclaimed such assurance (“... for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day” 1 Timothy 1:12) also be concerned about being disqualified? Clearly, Paul didn’t have a sliver of doubt about his salvation, because he understood grace and its amazing nature. His concern was for rewards, not salvation.

2. Rewards are worked for, they are not gifts.

Just as many salvation scriptures have been inappropriately connected with reward, many reward scriptures are erroneously equated with salvation. When this happens, we forget the aspect of **works in** (not *for*) our salvation.

In 1 Corinthians 3:5-8 Paul rebukes the Corinthian believers for creating factions—some with Paul, some with Apollos. Paul points out in verse 6, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth.” He continues that, “neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything” (v. 7). This seems to minimize the role of works in the believers life. Paul does this because he is emphasizing the growth-giving work of God that outshines all of our earthly work. If we work to gain a following of men, we are deceived.

So if we are not to work to gain a following of men, are works not important? This would be an incorrect assumption. Paul concludes that “We are God’s fellow **workers**” (v. 9) and that “each one will receive his own reward **according to his own labor**” (v. 8).

John records the words of Jesus in Revelation 22:12—

“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.”

Salvation is given. Rewards are earned. When do we get them?

3. Rewards are given in Heaven.

We won't get them here. Rewards are not the prosperity gospel that teaches each good work receives a quick, earthly, and often in-kind reward. Rewards are "imperishable" and thus can only be gained in heaven. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 shows that—

...if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

"The day" that will "show it" is the day of the believer's judgement, when we stand before the throne and each man is rewarded "according to his labors" (1 Corinthians 3:8).

4. Rewards should be a motivator for godly living.

Rewards are a work of the flesh that honors God. We ought to work to receive rewards. 2 Peter 1:5-11 teaches us that along

with our saving faith we are to “apply all diligence” to add these works to our faith—

- Moral excellence
- Knowledge
- Self-control
- Perseverance
- Godliness
- Brotherly kindness
- Love

Then Peter gives the powerful reminder that when these are added to faith with all diligence, that “they render you neither useless nor unfruitful” (2 Peter 1:8) and “in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you” (2 Peter 1:11). That is, we will enter into the Kingdom with the words “well done, good and faithful servant.” This ought to be a powerful motivator for the believer—to please the Savior.

The Apostle John tells us that it is possible to “lose what we have accomplished.” He is not speaking of salvation. His concern is that “you may receive a full reward” (2 John 1:8). To abide in Christ, walk with Christ, be filled with the Spirit, know Christ, and love Christ are terms the New Testament writers use to speak about our growing relationship with Christ. They are not salvation words, but relationship words.

Conclusion

There is no law nor work of the law that can save. There is no work of the flesh that can sanctify. But rewards are a work of the law of Christ, performed in the flesh, that honors God. So, let us proclaim together—

*We'll work till Jesus comes,
We'll work till Jesus comes,
We'll work till Jesus comes,
And we'll be gathered home.ⁱ*

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How did Thomas become Doubting Thomas? [Click here](#) to request my free 17 page e-booklet, “**The Three Statements of Doubting Thomas.**”

ⁱ Elizabeth Mills (1805-1829)