



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 194

As a perversion of the law of God, in its most evident form antinomianism affirms that believers are no longer bound by the law of God and thus not obligated to adhere to its mandates.

Dualistic antinomianism – Another form of antinomianism which appeared even during the time of the apostles is known as dualistic antinomianism. Greek philosophy taught that the spiritual world is good and redeemable while the physical world is evil and unredeemable. Such thinking crept into the first century church and Christian thinking, teaching that salvation is only for the soul and not the body.

Such a view affirmed that God is only interested in a person's spiritual life and not his physical body. As a result it was thought that those who believed in Christ could do with their bodies as they wished, behaving self-indulgently, recklessly, and lawlessly, rejecting any responsibility for their actions, for after all the physical was not important. But contrary to such pagan dualism, the Bible does not pit the spiritual against the physical, for it teaches the essential goodness of God's physical creation, including our physical bodies. God's salvation impacts the entire person, body and soul, where both are being cleansed from sin in the Christian life (1 Thessalonians 5:23), and ultimately resulting in a glorified body-soul existence in heaven (Romans 6:4-6; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2).

Peter gives a damning description of those who affirmed such antinomianism when he talks about false teachers in 2 Peter 2. These false teachers are likened to waterless springs, clouds, and fruitless trees; pretending and promising to have spiritual water and food, but were exposed as hypocrites having nothing, being spiritually dead and barren, and thus under the condemnation of God (Jude 12-13). These promise liberty but end up in bondage to sin. But on the other hand, true believers are exhorted to be faithful to the gospel, to pray in accordance with the Holy Spirit, to be obedient to God, and to wait and hope for the return of Christ (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 John 3:3; Jude 20-21).

Spiritual antinomianism – The third form of antinomianism is referred to as spiritual antinomianism, or spiritualism, where adherents claim to be directed by the inner voice Holy Spirit, and thus they ignore the written Word of God. Those who hold to this view state that the Spirit leads them to live their lives through His inner promptings and thus they are free from the need to study the Bible, to understand biblical doctrines, and to adhere to them. This is not very different from the Gnostics of the first century, who stressed their so called "secret knowledge" (gnosis, 1 Timothy 6:20-21).

But such a view is not only unbiblical but also irrational, for the Holy Spirit is the author of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21). The Spirit is not the author of confusion or contradiction, but works with and through His Word, and never apart from or against it (1 Corinthians 14:33). So when someone claims to have been led by the Holy Spirit to do something, whether due to a feeling or prompting they have had, or some private revelation or dream from God, which undeniably contradicts His Word, then it is clear that it is not the Spirit who is leading them, for He does not speak with a forked tongue.

This kind of antinomianism seems to have been present at the Corinthian church, causing serious issues for them, who had tolerated all sorts of practices contrary to the Bible. Paul admonished and even rebuked them for placing themselves above Scripture (1 Corinthians 14:36-38; 2 Thessalonians 3:14). When we confront the antinomians with their lawlessness they usually respond by calling us legalists. Yes, it is legalism to impose on believers rules which God does not command; but it is not legalism to demand that believers obey the moral law of God. That is biblical!

Thus with the light of Scripture and the empowering of the Spirit we are called to stand guard against these heresies, maintain the purity of the gospel and the unity of the church, and thus bring glory to God.