

ANTINOMIANISM No.2

By James Poole

The controversy: are the saints of God under the law as a rule of life?

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God (Romans 3.19)."

In our introductory article on antinomianism we concluded that there are primarily two positions regarding the subject; that of the Arminians, and that of the Predestinarians. We shall modify that assertion slightly and call those that crave a coded law "Legalists" rather than Arminian, for there may be some few Arminians that are not Legalists, and there may be some Legalists that are not Arminians. The Legalist's position then, is that believers are under a coded law, the ten commandments, as a rule of life and conduct after being born again. They claim the law was given to believers by God as a code of conduct, and follow it they must. Predestinarians fully reject this absurd notion. The coded law as a rule of life is to Predestinarians nothing more than the galling yoke of the works system revived from the dead.

It is fair to say that the two positions are poles apart, and cannot both be correct.

We admit that the best doctrinal views expressed by man, on whatever subject, is bound to be flawed by prejudices and occasional excessive overstatements unless we are subdued by the gracious Spirit of God. In setting forth the Predestinarians' point of view we

desire to be honest and fair, and beg to be forgiven if, and whenever, we fall into error.

Paul, in addressing the Romans in the text at our heading, was about as clear on the utility of the law as could be. Whatever the law had to say, according to Paul, was said only to those under it. By under the law, we understand, being ruled by it, or as our Legalist opponents would say, "The law is your rule of life!" Thus, if the law is your rule of life, if you are under it, then the law is speaking to you. Now comes the problem. Paul also wrote to the same Romans, "*For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace*" (Romans 6.14)." We ask in all seriousness, are our Legalist adversaries under the law or under grace? They cannot, no matter how much they duck and dodge, twist and turn, wiggle and squirm, have it both ways. If they wish so fervently to have the law speak to them as their rule of life, then they have fallen from grace (Galatians 5.4). Should they prefer to also be under grace, then, they cannot have the law speak those rules of life to them with which they are so madly in love.

Legalists will no doubt counter our position. They will respond that we falsely accuse them, for they seek only to live under the law after they have been born again. "We want to be under the law only to serve God, and not in order to get life," is about what they will say. We ask them this: "before or after the new birth, what is the difference?" "*Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh* (Galatians 3.3)?" Again they will attempt a response, saying that the text in Galatians 3.3 is contrasting life gotten from either law or works. So we must further ask, what is serving under the law as a rule of life but daily life gotten or maintained under the law? Law is law, whenever or wherever it is in force, and works are graceless

works if accomplished under the law. It is pure lunacy to contend for the law, before or after the new birth, as being different! This law, with all its requirements, is the same yesterday, today, and forever, for it is but the holy expression of God's standard for all who are under it. This law never changes in form, but it was changed, or set aside, for a superior law to accommodate an unchangeable priesthood (Hebrews 7.12,24). Its requirements will never abate; thus, for example, if a man be circumcised, or attempts to keep any part of the law, he is a debtor to do the whole law (Galatians 5.3). Picking or selecting portions of the law will never find acceptance before God, the judge of all. And too, its curse never yields (Galatians 3.10). To attempt to serve God, in spiritual life under the law, after being born again, is essentially no different than attempting to serve God in spiritual death under the law to get born again. The conclusions will be the same no matter which side of the Spiritual birth the law is utilized. There is no difference except positionally. We hope to explain from Galatians 2.19 and other texts in proper order.

An overview of the law of Moses.

In the following we will use the term "law" as being exclusively the law of Moses, or those commandments delivered from Mount Sinai. Other laws will be considered in due course.

What is the law? It is the foundation principles for the first covenant Jehovah made with old natural Israel, which was not faultless, (Hebrews 8.7) and furthermore, was to decay and vanish away, as is so clearly stated in the following: "In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away (Hebrews 8.13)." We hold as dear as life itself that the force of the law vanished with the passing of the old covenant

and with old Israel. How then can we be punitively accused of being "Antinomian" or against this law which is no longer in force?

To whom was the law given? To the natural Israelites, and none other! "Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises (Romans 9.4f)." The given law was as exclusively the property of Israel as was the adoption, glory, covenants, service and promises. To now attempt to extend the enactment's of the law to others outside old Israel will necessitate also the extension of all the other properties mentioned in Romans 9.4. We certainly do admit to being "Antinomian" or against applying this law to any other than those for whom it was initially intended; old Israel.

When was the law given? During the Levitical priesthood. "If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron (Hebrews 7.11)?" The Levitical order of priesthood was but a temporary priesthood, thus there was the need of another order of priesthood after the similitude of Melchisedec (Hebrews 7.15). Jesus was that priest: "By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament (Hebrews 7.22)." It should be clear that since the law was given during, and for a temporary institution, that it was to be of no force during any other institution of priestly service. Jesus was born, lived, and died under the law given during the temporary priesthood of Levi, or Aaron, and took it out of the way, to introduce an infinitely superior law founded on better principles. By God's great free grace, Predestinarians have been blessed to yield in liberty to that superior law and pronounce themselves "Antinomian" or against that galling

yoke of the temporary law given under the Levitical priesthood.

How did Paul describe the law? We look to II Corinthians chapter 3 for a partial answer. It was a killing letter, verse 6; it was a ministration of death, engraven in stone, verse 7; it was a ministration of condemnation, verse 9; it was made glorious because it had no intrinsic glory, verse 10; it is done away, verse 11; it is abolished, verse 13. Also, the yoke Peter said neither our fathers nor we are able to bear (Acts 15.10) Paul described as a yoke of bondage, (Galatians 5.1). Is this then the law our acrimonious enemies insist is a rule of life for all those having been born anew by the Spirit? Never! For our part we had rather be "Antinomians" or against such a law. We stand in no anxious frame of mind waiting to hear that "ram's horn from Horeb" bleat out its dreadful sounds in our ears. If not deceived, we much prefer the sweet sound of the silver gospel trumpet with its certain notes of imputed righteousness through free grace. *"Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine (I Timothy 1.9,10)."* If the Legalist gang feels somehow they qualify for law service under these terms, as Paul set them forth, let them go for it. We prefer to be "Antinomian" in respect to the law and this catalog of foul conduct.

What did the law do? Negatively, it cursed every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them (Galatians 3.10). Brethren, this is dreadful, dreadful language for poor sinners. How dare they apply for relief at the law? The very curse of

God falls without abatement on all those who are of the works of the law, and who fail in even one single thing! For those which desire to yoke up to this rigid, relentless system we suggest that even despite their desire to be for the law, it is decidedly against them. That is unless they are able to rise to a self-accomplished perfection in their flesh even Paul found impossible (Romans 7.21). Positively, the law *"was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith (Galatians 3.24)."* It is beyond dispute that the children of God live and walk by faith. Text after text in the New Testament so establishes that great point of doctrine. So, then, *"But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster (Galatians 3.25)."* Which will it be then? Law? Faith and law? or faith alone, since we are no longer under a schoolmaster? May it be our prayer to cry, "Dear Lord, give us that sweet faith of Christ, that we might be set at liberty from that dreadful master, law, with all its thundering and cursings."

If we accepted the definition imposed on us by the Legalists, that to be against the law as a rule of life is Antinomianism, we must also conclude that Paul was not only the chief of sinners (I Timothy 1.15), but was as well the chief of Antinomians! Hear Paul again: *"We are no longer under a schoolmaster (the law, verse 24)."* How, dear brethren, could it be thought possible that we can be under the law as a rule of life and at the same time not be under the schoolmaster named Law? We leave that to the Legalists to sort out. The proposition is as confusing as trying to mix grace and works in the reserving of a remnant by election. (See Romans 11.4-6.)

Justification and the law

"But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith (Galatians 3.11)." Justification should be no mystery to those that believe their Bible and are taught by the Spirit of God. This clear text proves beyond all possible dispute that in God's sight, or as God sees man, he does not become just as a result of his personal efforts to keep, or live under the law as a rule of life. The expression "by the law" in the text however, seems to indicate that the argument is not, can we be justified by keeping the law, but, will the law itself justify us for keeping it? By way of illustration we suggest that if a sinner went before the law and said, "I have done what you required" the law would in return respond, saying, "Nevertheless, I will not, I cannot, justify you. All your righteousnesses are as filthy rags." On the other hand, the law would never, and could never, tell the sinner that faith, by, of, and in Jesus Christ was his only hope of justification before God, though it be a certain truth.

Even the law-keeping of Christ did not justify sinners. Being made under the law (Galatians 4.4) He fully and perfectly kept all the law from His birth in a manger to His death on the cross. But for what purpose? Not that He might justify His elect by fulfilling the law, but that He might be a fit sacrifice for their sins. *"Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2.17)."* Jesus was surely faithful in those things pertaining to God, including the law. But, it was His coming forth from the dead that justified His chosen seed, and not His law-keeping. *"Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification (Romans 4.25)."* Raised again for our justification. Our sins (offences) were removed, were laid upon Him, when He was delivered up as a Lamb to the slaughter. No longer could

the law charge or condemn us for those transgressions. But being cleared of our crimes by His death would not, in itself, give us standing before the Father. He must rise from the tomb as victor over death, hell, and the grave, bearing His sheaves with Him. In so doing He fully justified us forever and completely.

It appears to us that the blessed redemption work of the Saviour was three-fold. First, He lived in our behalf, keeping a law we could never keep. That law-keeping, when accomplished for us, and imputed to us, could render us clear, but never justify us, for that would only leave us as non-transgressors. It must be remembered, justification implies a previous guilt. Second, He was delivered up for those sins we had committed, and for which we had nothing to pay. That deliverance, in our behalf, would certainly cleanse us of those foul deeds, but would only cancel the debt owed; again, for which we could never personally pay. Third, He came forth from the tomb as the Father had in covenant promised Him. "*Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption Acts 2.27ff.*" God sent His Son to save His people from their sins, (Matthew 1.21) and when He accomplished all He was sent to do and suffer, He said, "*It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost (John 19.30).*" He was placed in the awful tomb; the regions of death and blank darkness. But God the Father had been fully pleased with what His dear Son had done and endured. He stamped satisfaction over the whole! Hear the Prophet: "*He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities (Isaiah 53.11).*" Observe well that Jesus did bear their (His children's) iniquities. He did bear them on the tree, and He did bear them into the tomb, but it could never be imagined that He did bear them out of the tomb in His resurrection. When He came forth for their justification the sins were left behind in

the foul regions. All was satisfied! The law could no more make any demands on those for whom He died. Being gathered up with Him from the tomb the children of election stood before the Father, cleared of failing to keep the law, cleansed of the sins they did commit, and justified as though they had never transgressed the law, either by omission or commission in the first place. This is justification by the faith of Christ. It is now just for saints to be pure in God's sight, for the law, as well as the Giver of the law, was satisfied. Satisfied, we may add, with what Jesus did, totally apart from our efforts or failings. Why then, dear children of a full, free salvation, complete with total justification and all of redemption's eternal blessings, would we seek to return to that stern, cold, merciless law for a rule of life? Has not Jesus met all the law's demands? Is not the Father satisfied with His Son, and us in Him? Can we now, living in newness of life, do more than has been done by our Law-keeper to please God? And, dare anyone suggest Jesus only met the requirements of the law for our standing in eternity, and not for our present sojourn? Are we, if not deceived in our hope, fully justified or not? If justified, are we not justified by faith, the faith of Christ imparted to us as a free gift?

These very problems of antinomianism, being either for or against the law as a rule of life, raised a serious doubt in the mind of the Apostle concerning the standing of the Galatians. "*I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you. Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law (Galatians 4.20,21)?*" We suspect those that lust after the law as a rule of life, and lambaste us as Antinomians, are like the Galatians, and have not really heard the law.

If the Lord blesses, we hope to take up this subject again, and

continue on the many other texts respecting the law and the children of God, especially those relating to justification.

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