

The Marrow Controversy #03: Danger of Antinomianism

The Marrow Controversy

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... the controversy surrounding the writing and the republication of *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* in the 16th and 17th and 18th century's theological controversies. I have tried to say to you that the significance of the Marrow and the significance of the Marrow controversy lies not so much in what the group, in and of itself, is. And it may well have been a wise thing for me to have thus emphasized this right from the start. But as we have discovered in our studies in these days and, as many of you have confessed to me and that I have found my own heart exposed before this teaching, the Auchterarder creed and the Marrow controversy and the areas which we have been examining together act, do they not, as a litmus paper to us. They enable us to discern characteristics and marks and forums in our Christian experience, in our Christian ministry, in our work as pastors of the flock of God and preachers of the Word of God. But in a very real sense, are indices to us, an index to us individually of where we are in relationship to the grace of God. And it would have been my greatest desire that alongside these theological and historical studies in which we have been engaged, it might have been possible to provide for you a fundamental and basic exegesis and exposition of all those passages of Scripture that pertain to the relationship of the law and the gospel. And certainly were it possible, in terms of time, this would have been something that I personally would have been anxious to engage in.

But I trust under God that our consideration together during these sessions as I have been trying to expound some pastoral lessons from the Marrow controversy and the many conversations that you may have had individually and the conversations I have certainly had with many brethren, I trust that this will send us back not merely to read *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, nor even to procure those remarkably cheap sets of Thomas Boston's works which I warmly commend to you. I trust these studies together will send us back to the Word of the living God, to burrow afresh in the exegesis of those great passages where law is expounded and grace is explained and the two are brought together in the most glorious harmony that we may be better fitted to be able ministers of the new covenant.

This is one of the hardest knots in all divinity for us to untie and it is a matter that must burn upon our consciences, brethren, in these days that we may wrestle with it and pray

for ourselves that God will break forth light out of his holy Word for our own hearts and for our own ministries.

Now we are turning of this, our last session, once again to the pastoral lessons of the Marrow controversy. The Marrow Men we might summarize by saying, were accused of the three As. They were accused of Amyraldianism, although they held to a doctrine of definite or particular atonement. They were accused of Arminianism, although they themselves preached not free will, but free grace. And they also were accused of Antinomianism, as though, as we shall see in a moment they tenaciously that the law of God remained as the rule of life for the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. And those of you who have obtained a copy of the Marrow will notice that the second part of the Marrow is simply a confirmation of this position. It is an exposition of the place of the law of God in the life of the believer.

But when we reflect on these accusations that were set against them, it is certainly not at all surprising to realize that they were being accused of Antinomianism. Wherever natural hearts or even gracious hearts bound by a legal spirit hear the message of the fullness of grace in Christ and the freeness of grace in the gospel offer, the question inevitably and almost invariably seems to arise. Shall we then go on in sin to our heart's content in order that grace may abound?

And it is striking to notice that it is precisely at this point that we as pastors of those who in our flocks and in our wider sphere have become Antinomians. It is precisely at this point that we are in danger ourselves of falling back into Legalism in our counsel towards them and returning to teaching the law of God as though it were a covenant of works.

And so by way of introduction to this our, our third theme, let us recognize that wherever free grace is fully preached from an unfettered gospel spirit, the accusation of Antinomianism has ever arisen.

Take our blessed Lord Jesus himself. When John the Baptist came preaching the grace of law as the instrument of God to lead men to repentance and under the special constraints of the dispensation during which he was living he neither ate nor drank. And when men recognized his sensitive prophetic spirit held in this great oath he had made to serve God in this special way, men immediately cried, "Legalist. Legalist."

But no sooner had the Son of Man appeared eating and drinking than men called him a glutton and a wine bibber and, in other words, cried of the very Son of God himself, "Antinomianism has come."

And the constant carping criticism of the Pharisees and the rabbis against the Son of Man was that in his free grace towards sinful mankind, he abrogated the law of Moses.

Understand, you remember, it is true of the apostle of free grace. Romans 3:7-8, "If through my falsehood God's truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being

condemned as a sinner? And why not do evil that good may come as some men slanderously charge us with saying? Their condemnation is just.”

And I those words already alluded to, “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more. What shall we say then?”

What do we conclude from this apostolic gospel of free grace? Shall we conclude that sin may reign that grace may abound?

So, as you see, and it is very important for us to notice, that the kind of Antinomianism of which Paul is speaking in Romans 6:1, following, that kind of Antinomianism and so many kinds of Antinomianism turn out to be is a false conclusion from a true premise. The premise is true that where sin has abounded, grace has abounded all the more. But the conclusion drawn from that premise that we may therefore go on to sin to our heart’s content as the apostle demonstrates, is a conclusion that must receive the apostolic anathema. And yet, you see, it is of equal importance that we ourselves as pastors are to guard our own hearts and our own ministries from a retreat into Legalism. It is of vital importance that we recognize that the premise on which that conclusion is based that grace super abounds over sin, is a premise that is biblical and apostolic and true and comes from the very heart of the gospel and the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it is against that background that I want, this morning, with you in our final study to focus attention on a number of matters that arose out of the context of the Marrow controversy.

First of all, I want us to look together at something of the nature of Antinomianism. One might even say, as we shall see, the natures of Antinomianism, because it has many faces.

Secondly, I want to direct your attention to one practical cause of Antinomianism, not the exclusive cause, but one practical and common cause of Antinomianism. And thirdly and finally I want us to examine, as time allows us, I want us to examine the issues that are at stake in the Antinomian controversy.

First of all, then, let me say something about the nature of Antinomianism. The historical use of the expression Antinomian, as you probably know, appears to have arisen in the days of the great reformer Martin Luther. You may remember his emphasis on justification by free grace producing the freedom of the Christian man as he calls us, the most free man of all who is Lord of all. And in the period round about the end of the 1530s, round about 1537, one of Luther’s friends, John Agricola, took this great preaching of free grace and began to drive it to logical conclusions that were not biblical and began to speak about the believer as being free from the law of God as the rule of his life.

And, of course, from these conclusions from true premises, Martin Luther drew back and began to speak about the Antinomianism of his friend Agricola. In general terms, then, and in this fundamental sense, Antinomianism is the view that the moral law, the Decalogue which Moses received is no longer binding on Christians as a rule of life.

Now it is obviously, surely, from what has already been said and what you know that Antinomianism, the thing itself existed long before the name was given to it. Even giraffes were giraffes before Adam gave them that name. And the same is true of Antinomianism.

But if we may in our own context in the ongoing development of reformed theology, simplify matters a little, we could put it like this. The Westminster Confession of Faith, as you know, teaches that while the law is not a covenant of works to the believer, the law remains as a rule of life for the believer. He is no longer bound to the law as though it were a covenant of works. For it never was a covenant of works. But he is bound forever during the course of his Christian pilgrimage, he is bound to the law as a rule of life. And it is this, in one way or another, the law of God as the rule of the believer's life. It is this, I say, in one way or another that Antinomianism denies.

But it is important for us, important for our fellowship with Christian brethren, important for us in order that we may guard a chaste tongue to recognize that Antinomianism takes a variety of forms. And it is always a danger, brethren, that we use Antinomianism as a pejorative curse word upon those who may be true Christians. If we are to receive the apostolic charge, we need to remember that in these matters the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome. He must be able to charge others consistently not to dispute merely about words. He must remember that he is called to correct his opponents with gentleness. And you remember how in the pastoral epistles one of the great issues that already was at stake was the place of the law in the life of the believer. And it is in that context that the Lord through his apostle gives us these restraints upon our own natural fiery spirits, gives us these restraints on those remnants of corruption that would flare up and accuse brethren by banding words foolishly and irrationally. And so it is important, I say, for us to have a clear grasp of what these words mean and also for us to have a faithful recognition that this Antinomianism, error though it may be, appears in a whole variety of forms. And let us beware, brethren, we are not always aware of this, but we so often attribute the worst possible logical conclusions of theological positions to men who themselves would eschew such logical conclusions and whose personal lies are beyond reproach. And so this is a matter in which we not only need the wisdom of Solomon, but we need something of the meekness and the gentleness of the servant of the Lord himself. And we must pray in these days that God will give to us something of that spirit.

And that is what I want to suggest to you, that in our consideration of the nature of Antinomianism, it is, in fact, a pastoral and a theological duty for us to distinguish between different kinds of Antinomian teachings. And let me, therefore, suggest to you that we will probably encounter Antinomianism in one of three different forms.

First of all, Antinomianism may appear in what we might call a doctrinal form. There have been men who have held that the law of God is abrogated both as a covenant of works and as a rule of life for the believer fundamentally on doctrinal grounds. In other words, the abolition of the law as the believer's rule of life has been the logical conclusion of a theological or doctrinal premise or presupposition. And all of you know that this took place already within the context of reformed theology not only in the days

of Martin Luther, as in the teaching of Agricola, but also in the days of our Puritan forefathers and was associated so often with the names of men like John Saltmarsh and Tobias Crisp and John Eaton. And what was the position they adopted? Well, simply it was this. They placed such an emphasis on the prevenient, eternal, electing, distinguishing grace of God that they felt any question of law was antithetical and opposite to the mighty grace of God. They emphasized, as you may know, that justification was eternal and temporal justification merely an expression of that eternal justification. They emphasized immediate assurance by the indwelling witness of the Holy Spirit almost apart from the Word of God. And the consequence, of course, the logical development of such views was that the law of God in all its objectivity really had no relevant place for the Christian believer if he had all this justification from eternity, justification in time, the Spirit of God witnessing with his Spirit that he was a child of God. Then what need for an objective standard for such a believer so in grace?

And so in those days Antinomianism was actually associated with Hyper Calvinism. And it failed, as far as I understand it, to see those clear scriptural connections of which we spoke in the discussion yesterday between the mighty indicatives of the grace of God that join us to the Lord Jesus Christ and raise us up into the heavenly places and those immediate moral imperatives that flow out of the indicatives of the grace of God, that great pattern laid down for us in the giving of the law at Sinai.

“I have brought you out of the land of bondage, out of the house of Egypt.”

Therefore we can go. We are free men. We do not need any laws. We have the redemption of God changing us and shaping us. We are free people. What need of law?

No, no, says the Lord. Therefore, therefore, remember to guard your freedom, to guard your redemption. You shall love no other gods before me. You shall live a life that is worthy of your calling. And here are my 10 great words to you to direct you in the way in which you should live.

So that the great mistake of those Antinomians, those Hyper Calvinists in the 17th century was to rend asunder the things that God had joined together in his inspired Word.

And it is interesting, too, to notice that in the early days and as it began to develop, if I may say so without offence to any here, the movement that we know in the United Kingdom as the Christian Brethren that was the foundation of the emphasis of Dispensationalism and some forms of Fundamentalism here in the United States. That great outburst of interest and concern for the purity and the unity of the Church that took place in the 19th century especially under the influence of John Nelson Darby that had so many similarities, curiously enough, to the emphasis of Hyper Calvinism in the 17th century. There, too, we find the same logical conclusions being drawn from the premises of the grace of God. And you may know how little time John Nelson Darby had for the kind of teaching that appears in a book like Patrick Fairbairn's book, *The Revelation of Law in Scripture* and how much less time Darby had for any notion that there was a covenant between God and Adam in the Garden of Eden. Indeed, he speaks of the

covenant of works at one point as a fable, a mischievous fable. And so it was hardly surprising with his view of the Dispensations of God's dealings with his people that from a theological point of view he could see no position for the moral law of God and the Decalogue in the life of the believer. And in Darby's eventual full blown Dispensationalism, the law of God as a rule of life became confined to the dispensation of law and strictly and logically speaking had nothing to say to the period of grace.

And if I may say, speaking entirely for myself as an individual with connection with no church organization or anyone else in the whole world, I do believe that that is, perhaps, the chief reason why in our country and many Christian Brethren settles today, there is so much emphasis on tradition and so little emphasis on thoroughgoing, rigorous, ethical teaching and application of the Word of God. So that at the end of the day the only thing that matters in a professing Christian home is that the child has made a decision for Christ. And because the law of God which is the standard of our lives, which is the mirror into which we look to test ourselves according to the work of the Spirit of grace within us, when that no longer has relevance for us, when there are no ethical imperatives in the life of the believer, then no fruits are necessary as the evidencing signs of a work of the mighty Spirit of God's grace within us and Decisionism takes the place of grace and Easy Believism takes the place of the fruit of the Spirit. And wherever it is not seen that unconditional grace involves us in the most unconditioned serious obligations to the God who has redeemed us, where it is not seen that Christ did what the law could not do in order that what the law could not do in and by itself God might do in us by the power of his Spirit fulfilling the just requirements of the law. Where this escapes notice in theological thinking, there may be a generation who are able to hold themselves in to the remnants of the moral law of God. But the day comes and always has come historically, even if it doesn't necessarily need to come logically, it always comes historically and practically when Christianity becomes more a matter of decision than a matter of living. And grace becomes an excuse for licentiousness.

And so Antinomianism appears in a doctrinal form.

In the second place, and not necessarily antagonistic to that first expression, Antinomianism has sometimes appeared in an exegetical form and probably at no time more frequently than in these days in which we live. It has become common places nowadays, as all of you know, from reading modern theological treatises, it has become common place for lawyers, for theologians and writers and scholars and lawyers for that matter, too, to take a view of the law which, to their horror, did they know it, is astonishingly like the position adopted on the one hand by Hyper Calvinists and the other hand by Dispensationalists. That is, it is held on the basis of the exegesis of the New Testament that there is no longer any place for the law of God as the law of morality in the life of the believer. The Christian does not need the law. For Jesus did away with the law.

In the English speaking world that position has often been adopted by many liberal scholars. But it has been adopted not only by liberal scholars, but by men even of evangelical reputation who have gone into print saying similar things.

According to one of the very best known scholars in the United Kingdom, I quote, “According to Paul, the believer is not under the law as a rule of life. Paul, therefore, makes no distinction between the end of the ceremonial law and the retention of the moral law.”

Now let me say again, lest I be misunderstood that one is not impugning the morality of Brethren in Christ by saying that this position is Antinomianism. In the case of this position there are many men who maintain for all practical purposes the same lifestyle as many who regard the Decalogue as the believers’ rule of life, except that the question of the continuation of the sabbath has become a major point of embarrassment necessarily to them. But how do they maintain the same form of Christian life? They do so like this. They have replaced the Mosaic Decalogue with the Christian Novemalogue. In other words, instead of having 10 Commandments rooted in the Exodus chapter 20, they have Nine Commandments that they find rooted in the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and the apostles.

And I want to say to you, brethren, that I have a sneaking suspicion that it is the absence of the sabbath commandment that is, perhaps, the most significant thing of all. And it is this that sometimes gives us a clue as we shall see as we develop this whole point, gives us a clue to understanding the mentality and, indeed, the spirituality of some men, I say some, not all men who evangelically hold that Antinomianism is the position of the New Testament. For while from one point of view the difference between this exegetical Antinomianism and the position of the Westminster Confession of Faith is only a matter of 10 percent of the commandments, its repercussions are far more considerable than 10 percent divergence in the manner in which we live. As for the reason that it involves a basic dislodging of the place of the law of God as we shall see in the history of redemption.

Now obviously I have given myself sufficiently to suggest to you that I do not share the view of those who expound this Novemalogue position. But I want to say this to you, that even if they were right and the position that I personally espouse were wrong and the traditional reformed position wrong, there is a far greater gap between these two positions than merely the gap of 10 percent of the commandments of God. And it is vital for us to grasp this if we are to see some of the issues that are perennially at stake in understanding the relationship between the law and the gospel.

So Antinomianism appears in a doctrinal form. It appears in an exegetical form. And in the third place Antinomianism appears in an experimental form.

It was Thomas Shepherd who wrote that those who deny the use of the law to any that are in Christ become patrons of free vice under the mast of free grace. And this kind of Antinomianism, brethren, is sheer wickedness. It turns the grace of God into lasciviousness. It is reminiscent, appallingly reminiscent of that doggerel, “Free from the law, oh blessed condition. I can sin as I please and still have remission.” That is not Evangelicalism. That is Roman Catholicism.

In its mildest form in the [?] of the professing believer, it is but the casual remark as you indicate to him that he is breaking the speed limit on the highway and he shrugs his shoulders and he says, “Well, it doesn’t matter, because I am not under the law. I am under grace.”

In other cases increasingly in the times in which we live, it appears in the guise of self acceptance about which Dr. Dee Witwer speaking yesterday afternoon and we well know in the message of the gospel that as man who has been brought out of the pit and from the miry clay, we need to learn to see ourselves reflected as the beloved in the Song of Solomon over whose lives the banner of the Lord Jesus is love. We need to be embraced increasingly, beloved, to see the riches of the glory of the grace that Christ has bestowed upon us and if we have a weakness as those who emphasize the significance of the law of God as a rule of life, brethren, it is that we sometimes do not lay a gracious enough foundation in the work of redemption in the minds and hearts of our people that will enable them to bear that blessed yoke of the law of God. We do not show to them out of the riches of Scripture the mighty thing that God has done for them in Christ. It is no small thing that they are regenerated. It can only be parallel to the creation of the world when God said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” and the resurrection of his Son when he raised him from the sleep of death and brought him into everlasting life. To become a Christian is the most supernatural, miraculous thing in all the world even although it happens silently and secretly in the life of the believer. And only a full orb ed gospel understanding of all that grace has done can ever sustain the believer as he lives under the law of God as the rule of his life. We need to expound these things to our people.

But it is a very different thing under the guise of self acceptance to live any way we please as though the God who has engraced and enriched us in the power of the gospel had not called us from all eternity to himself in order that we might be conformed to the image of his only Son whose only life was conformed to the pattern of the holy law of God and came to fulfill it.

And, indeed, those who say that since God accepts me the way I am, I ought not to get straight jacketed in the law of God, I ought to be myself, even my worst self, we can only with pity say that they have never understood the grace of God and the gospel that makes men not like themselves, not even like their best self, but like Jesus and conforms them to his image.

So often in our day of individualism, in our day of licentiousness and our day when the world squeezes professing believers into its mold, Antinomianism in its worst form is merely licensed vice. Free grace becomes cheap grace and the Son of God is crucified afresh by the wickedness of men. May God prevent the Church from so perverting the grace of God and the sin that is drawing power of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ that men should say, “We may continue in sin that grace may abound.”

And so there is doctrinal Antinomianism. There is exegetical Antinomianism and there is experimental Antinomianism.

And it is against this background that I want to try to say something to you about the practical cause of Antinomianism and then about the issues that are at stake. And, again, let me issue a word of caution. Since Antinomianism takes these varying forms, not everything that is said now will be applicable to every single individual who holds to one of these forms. It would be an unhappy thing if we condemn men in Christ for positions they did not expound and I am not using in this address the word Antinomianism as a theological curse, but merely as a convenient, historically understood expression for that position that sets aside the Decalogue as a rule of life for the believer.

And so I want to turn with you to a matter that is not only theological, but profoundly pastoral. As we consider in the second place under this second heading one great practical cause of Antinomianism.

We would all recognize that Antinomianism often springs from an inability to understand and to appreciate the place of the law of God in the Christian mind. But I wonder if you have discovered as I have discovered in that measure of pastoral experience I have been privileged to know that very often there is much more at stake than merely the intellectual understanding of the position of the law in the economy of God.

You see, very often our temptation is to think of Antinomianism as though it were the opposite of Legalism. Isn't that true? When we associate these things together we say, "Now the opposite of Legalism is Antinomianism." Now I suggest to you, I believe, there is good biblical ground for saying this, that Antinomianism and Legalism are not opposites of one another, but they are both opposites of the grace of God in the gospel. And in actual fact, as you may have noticed, from time to time in dealing with me who have become Antinomians in actual practice and experience, their Antinomianism is a clear cut reaction not, first of all, against the grace of God, although it is certainly true. It is a clear cut reaction against Legalism. And yet in thinking that they have reached the opposite of their Legalism, at the end of the day many of them have only fallen into a Legalism that is more difficult for them ever to extricate themselves from than their former Legalism.

You see, Antinomianism can never be the cure for Legalism, because only grace is the cure for Legalism and it is a very important thing for us, brethren, as pastors, to recognize that even though a man reacts against Legalism into Antinomianism, very often the truth of the matter is this, that he retains precisely the same bondage spirit and legal frame as he had when he thought he was a Legalist. In his heart of hearts he thinks of God in exactly the same way he did when he thought he was a Legalist.

Ralph Erskine, one of the Marrow Men, once said that the greatest Antinomian was the Legalist. And, as you know, you can put it the other way around that the greatest Legalist is very often the Antinomian. Why? Because both distort the grace of God and both distort the grace of God and fail to recognize it in the law of God. And very often you will discover that men who are Antinomians are men who have fled to Antinomianism and yet have never escaped the ghost of the covenant of works to which they have been

married in their former bondage in Legalism. In their spirits they have never been divorced from the law of God as a covenant of works and so they seek to abandon the law of God all together.

Listen, again, to Thomas Boston.

“This Antinomian principle that it is needless for a man perfectly justified by faith to endeavor to keep the law and do good works, is a glaring evidence that legality is so engrained in man’s corrupt nature that until a man truly comes to Christ by faith, the legal disposition will still be reigning in him. Let him calm himself into what shape or be of what principles he will in religion, though he run into Antinomianism, he will carry along with him his legal spirit which will always be a slavish and unholy spirit.”

And very often in the reformed tradition and in reformed circles, those who have become Antinomian have been those who have espoused outwardly a reformed position in theology, but inwardly have had a spirit of bondage and a legal frame and in their heart of hearts, however they have understood the confession of faith and Dabney and Hodge and Berkhoff and Calvin and all the rest, in their heart of hearts they have never fully and radically been touched by they knowledge of the free grace of God in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You find that same thing in the writings of J H Thornwell. Whatever forum, however, Antinomianism may assume it springs from Legalism. None rush into the one extreme but those who have been in the other.

And this is something, brethren, we learn in pastoral experience and we learn it, do we not, inevitably from our own hearts. The Marrow Controversy is not a controversy a couple of hundred years ago in history. It is a controversy we often have with ourselves. And the only answer to the heart that is drawn in the direction of Legalism and then drawn in the direction of Antinomianism is to be drawn in the direction of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is my beloved Son. Listen to him. And not only listen to him, but feel the power of the persuading gracious promise of the Holy Spirit that he will take the grace that belongs to Christ and show it to us. Thank God he will show it to us. And we will know something of that assurance of faith and that persuasion that God is a benevolent Father to us.

And, you see, we could almost deduce this from first principles, because man by nature is a Legalist. And, therefore, he can never escape from being a Legalist by becoming an Antinomian. The only escape from Legalism, I say again to you, beloved, is grace.

Listen once more to John Calhoun as he speaks of the manifestation of this thing in the life of the true believer.

“Some degree of a legal spirit or of an inclination of heart to the way of the covenant of works still remains in believers and often prevails against them. They sometimes find it exceedingly difficult for them to resist that inclination to rely on their own attainments and performances for some part of their title to the favor and enjoyment of God.”

And it is because that is in every single one of us. But every child of God in days will have a tendency to flee into Antinomianism, to escape from this tension of being in Christ and yet at that same time being in me and being in the United States of America, of Scotland, of Canada or wherever it is. But the Word of God to us is that there is no escape from this tension in the life of the believer here and now. So long as he is in this world, so long as he is in Christ and knows the glories and the power of Christ's grace and yet is a man who lives in a life that has been sold under sin in which the mortgage of the law has been closed and only recently Christ has come in order to redeem us by the purchase price of his own blood. It is inevitable that such tension arises that at times we cry out, “Oh, wretched man that I am, who can deliver me from this body of death?” But the answer, beloved, is neither Legalism nor Antinomianism, but thanks be to God through Jesus Christ who through the mighty sin breaking power of his death has begun to fulfill by the Spirit in the life of the believer the just requirements of the law.

And that is, of course, the reason why in these mighty expositions of the place of the law of God the one thing the apostle can never say is that the law has died to the believer. Even although, as you know, so many commentators trying to find some significance in the illustration of Romans 7:1-6, the woman bound to a husband until he dies, which would seem apparently to draw in their minds the necessary conclusion that the law has died.

You see, Bunyan had the secret of that passage. That secret inclination to Adam the first that is in all of us, but the one thing the apostle can never say is that the law has died to the believer, but, rather, the believer has died to the law. The law still exists and the believer married to Jesus Christ in his imperfect state of sanctification will ever more know tension because he is married to a new husband and even that law in which he delights, he recognizes he fails to keep during this mortal pilgrimage. And there is no other way for the child of God to live who knows that God has revealed and etched his character upon the 10 Commandments of grace he has given to us. There is no other way for him to live than to seek the grace of the Spirit to fulfill what the law requires as a way of life and to cope with those days of tension when Satan comes and seeks to prod us in our spirits into Legalism and in our minds into Antinomianism.

And, you see, this is a pastoral lesson, isn't it? It is not merely a matter of the head. It is a matter of the heart and that for two reasons it is important. Because, you see, this heart reality of Antinomianism is very often and very easily hidden in doctrinal and theological and exegetical discussions and very often it can only be detected when a man dislocates the relationship of one Scripture to another and not in his isolated exegesis of one particular Scripture or perhaps even more significantly, however difficult and dangerous it may be to detect it, when the Spirit of Scripture is absent from the exposition of Scripture.

My dear brethren, this is a dangerous thing to say, but test the spirits. Not only test the spirits in the sense of the words that come out of the mouths, but test the spirits to ask whether these words come in the balance of Scripture and whether they come in the humble spirit of the servant of the Lord, because Antinomianism hides itself under all kinds of guises. And very often in our day there have been guises of high intellect and searching exegesis.

You see, this is one of those things that is almost impossible to express in propositional form. We feel we are grappling with something and we provide all the arguments against it. We bring to bear upon it what we feel to be the weight of Scripture and yet somehow or another we don't seem to be able to get hold of it. And the reason is because it is not a matter of the head at all. It is a matter of the heart. And sometimes, you know, brethren, we speak to men who have become Antinomians and we speak in order to establish the holy law of God and its perpetuity in the teaching of Scripture. And this is true and accurate. And yet all the while what we need to be dealing with pastorally is not Antinomianism, but Legalism in the heart.

And so it is a very vital pastoral matter for that reason and it needs the spiritual discernment of a spiritual Sherlock Holmes and a spiritual Perry Mason. We need to cry to God for such wisdom.

And yet it is important to see that this spirit of Legalism, this bondage spirit is also a frequent cause of Antinomianism, because it means that very often we will not deal with Antinomianism merely at the level of dogmatic polemic, but ultimately it can only be dealt with at the level of pastoral care, that pastoral, gracious, patient, faithful, Christful unfolding of the Word of God in the gospel applied in such a way as to set men free from the legality of their Spirits that grips their lives and in this extraordinary way makes them argue for Antinomianism.

And, you see, again, what a deep seated psychological pastoral problem this is. We are back in the Garden of Eden. Antinomianism, you see, that grew out of the legal frame of spirit that Satan planted in the hearts of our first parents. And that is why it is striking to notice that when the apostle Paul deals with this situation, he not only, as he does, for example, in Galatians chapter three, speaks about the place of the law in the economy of God and its position in redemptive revelation, but he is to deal with these people as a pastor. And he speaks to them and he says, "My dear friend, your real trouble is not merely intellectually that you don't understand the place of the law of God in the economy of redemption. Your trouble is that you have never really felt the power of the grace of God to set you free from a spirit of legality into bond service to Jesus Christ."

And in all his pastoral wisdom, you see, he takes this matter on both levels, the theological and the doctrinal level and yet all the while recognizing that it is a spiritual malady that lies at the heart of the matter.

Men who have been uncomfortable under the yoke of Christ as he has given to them the grace of law and will only be led away from their present Antinomianism by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So it is not only a matter of having a wrong view of the law. It is a matter, ultimately, of a wrong view of grace, be it revealed in law or in gospel.

But we must hurry on and, if you will, bear with me, come to the third section that I want to consider with you. We have looked at the nature of Antinomianism. We have labored this one practical cause of Antinomianism. But now let us try and give some attention to the doctrinal issues that are at stake in Antinomianism. Let us not think that this is a new matter. This is a question as old as the pastoral epistles. This is a question as old as the apostolic question: Why then the law? And we need to recognize that there are statements in the New Testament which do seem to speak with a certain harshness about the law of God and the bondage that was gendered under it and the ministry of death that was associated with it and, on the other hand, statements that seem to suggest that the believer is free from the law and that he is dead to that which held him captive.

The question that is raised is whether it is not, therefore, true to say that the believer has nothing to do with the law of God and, therefore, it would be erroneous to consider the law as the believer's rule of life. Is this not the card that is often said of so much Legalism in reformed Christianity, that the law is placed in a position that doesn't really belong to it?

Now were we giving ourselves, as I trust you will give yourself privately, with the stimulus and fellowship we have shared together in these days, were we giving ourselves to the study of the law of God as such and not to this particular historical controversy we were investigating, I believe it would have been possible to lay bear the biblical teaching on the law of God and draw conclusions from such a study that would stand side by side with some of the things that we have noticed.

But I want to suggest to you several things that may help you in your study of the law of God and in your seeking to grapple with this whole question of Antinomianism, some pointers that may help you in your own investigation of the doctrinal issues that are at stake.

Let me suggest to you that there are, it seems to me, a number of errors or mistakes with Antinomianism makes. The first is this. Antinomianism fails to take cognizance of the restrictive vocabulary with which the New Testament operates. Now that is a fair mouthful so let me repeat it. Antinomianism fails to take cognizance of the restrictive vocabulary with which the New Testament operates.

C E B Canfield whose recent commentary on the epistle to the Romans and whose commentary on Mark many of you will be familiar with, wrote a very important article in a theological journal in 1964 and he said this. I think it is a very striking thing.

“The Greek language used by Paul has no word group to denote Legalism, Legalist and legalistic.”

And, of course, they had no word there for Antinomianism.

“This means not just that he did not have a convenient terminology to express a key idea, but that he had no definite ready made concept of Legalism with which to work in his own mind. And this means, surely, that he was at a very considerable disadvantage.”

You understand the spirit in which Canfield writes.

“... a very considerable disadvantage compared with the modern theologian when he had to attempt to clarify the Christian position with regards to the law.”

He is not saying that Paul didn't understand the position of the law the way modern theologians did. He is saying Paul didn't have the linguistic equipment. It wasn't there available to him the way it has become available over centuries of historical theology.

“In view of this, we should,” says Canfield, “I think, be ready to reckon with the possibility that sometimes when he appears to be disparaging the law, what he really has in mind may not be the law itself, but the misunderstanding and the misuse of it for which we have a convenient term, but for which he had none.”

And you will find exactly the same point made very strikingly by John Calvin many centuries before in chapter seven, part two of Volume II of the *Institutes*. And, as far as I know, no Antinomian writer in the history of Antinomianism has ever given serious thought to the far reaching exegetical consequences and implications of that statement. For what it means is that an exegesis, a grammatical understanding of the statements of the apostle Paul particularly about the law that has no proper theological control will never be able to unravel the proper meaning of Paul's attitude to the law. And on the other hand, only when this grasped can we ever begin to understand why in the very passages we have Paul and others seem to take such a harsh view of the law, he has the most glowing things to say about the law in the whole of the New Testament. Have you ever noticed that in your reading of these great passages about the law, where are those things said about the law which Antinomian theologians would seize on to and say, “Well, there you are. There is the apostle Paul's view of the law.” And in those very passages he reaches almost heights of ecstasy when he speaks about the law.

Beloved, it is not in this 20th chapter of Exodus that the Bible tells us the law is holy and that the commandment is holy and good, but the law is spiritual and good, that the believer delights in the law of God in his inmost self. It is not even in Psalm 119 that we read this, although it is true. It is in that chapter where the mighty apostle wrestles with his sin in the face of the law of God and if he were but a natural man he would have immediately sprung into Antinomianism and said, “God rid me of this law.”

And yet the very thing he says is that the law is spiritual, the law is good. It bears the very character of God himself. And he delights in the law of God after the inward man.

Where do we learn of the glory of the ministry of the law? It is not on Mount Sinai that we are told precisely of the glory of the ministry of the law. It is cheek by jowl with those statements in 2 Corinthians three about the condemnation and death which that whole misused ministry of the law brought when men thought Sinai was a covenant of works.

In other words, while often the theological Antinomian will accuse the confession's position of failing to account of the development of the history of redemption from law to Christ, what in fact the Antinomian has failed to see is that he is coming to Scripture with tinged and tinted spectacles, with a certain exegetical framework that is extraneous to Scripture itself and can never explain and understand the antinomy that exists in many of the New Testament passages about the law. And the key to it is that we are dealing with a man who is grappling with the most fundamental issues of human experience when it comes into the orbit of the grace of God in the gospel and he didn't simply have the terms that you and I find as our common bread and butter as students of theology.

And I suggest to you, that is a very significant thing. Antinomianism fails to take cognizance of the restricted vocabulary with which the New Testament operates.

Secondly, Antinomianism consistently fails to embrace wholeheartedly the grace of God in the giving of the law.

Let me say that I believe it to be a terrible mistake not to recognize the vast differences between the revelation of God in the old and the revelation of God in the new covenants and I say that unashamedly, too, as a paedobaptist. Let it be said that that has often been one of the failures of Presbyterian and paedobaptist theology that the covenants of God have been regarded as though there were little difference between the old dispensation and the new dispensation. There is a radical difference. There is an enormous difference, so enormous is the difference that the presence of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament can be described by John by comparison with his presence in the Old Testament that the Holy Spirit was not yet. It is amazing. It is as radical a difference as that.

And yet at the same time it would be equally a mistake to go to the other extreme and to fail to see the wonderfully consistent presence of the grace of God in both testaments under both dispensations in both the old and the new covenants.

Let me put it simply to your heart like this. Is there a man here who is a true believer who wouldn't give all the treasures in the world to taste the grace of God and to delight in the grace of God the way the man who wrote Psalm 119 did? Isn't that true? Grace, was there not grace in the law?

Ah, it is all very well for the Antinomian to say that Torah means much more than Decalogue. Of course it does. But it can never mean less than Decalogue. Never. And if they want to be honest, most practical Antinomians and many doctrinal Antinomians and some exegetical Antinomians would choke before they could say the words:

“Oh, how I love they law. I delight in the law after the inner man.”

They could not truly say with Paul:

“I find the law to be spiritual and when I am at my very best and want to do good, I delight in the law of God after the inward man.”

The only man who could ever say that was the man who saw that in the giving of the commandments there was the operation of the grace of God. And such a man as in his humanity was our Lord Jesus Christ would find himself estranged from both Legalism and Antinomianism. Not only because it distorted the law, but because it distorted the God of grace who gave the law.

And then in the third place Antinomianism does not do justice to the relationship of the law to the history of redemption. You know that it is a basic presupposition in our reformed theology that the purpose of revelation, redemptive history and salvation is the restoration of the image of God in man. And that means, of course, that salvation and the economy of God to accomplish salvation is always restorative and recreative in scope. And we find much evidence for this pattern of things in Scripture. We find invariably that progressive revelation echoes and builds upon previous revelation and while all was drawing God’s people on to radical, fresh insight into the character of God and giving to them fresh levels of understanding and liberty, God’s redemptive revelation as it progresses, invariably calls them back also to what had previously been revealed. And furthermore we find that the pattern of God’s dealings as invariable the imperatives of obedience are always to be deduced from the indicatives of God’s grace.

Now what do we discover against that background in connection with divine law? Why, we discover that natural law, the law that was inbred in man at creation, we find that that law continues in the giving of the law at Sinai. That law that was inbred in man and evidences itself in the continuing presence of even Gentile, pagan obedience at times to the dictates of the law of God written in the heart of man.

Now that natural law grows out of the grace of creation. It has to do with the created order of things, with our [?], with what we are. And these laws were written in the heart of Adam and in the very structure of the society that came from the Creator’s hands so that *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* is able to say this. “Adam had as much of the law and heard as much of the law in the Garden as Israel did at Sinai, but only in fewer words and without thunder.”

But what do we see when we come to Sinai? We see the same pattern that worked grace.

“I am the Lord who brought you out.”

And this is no longer created grace giving rise to natural law. This is recreated, redeeming grace giving rise to moral law.

But what do we find when we try to relate natural law, created law to Sinaitic law? We find that there is clearer exposition. We find that there is intensive application. But are the laws any different? Oh, yes, there is application of them that is temporal and suited to the period of time with which God is calling out a people as a holy nation to himself. There is Jewishness in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. But that lies not in the contents of the moral law, but in the application of the moral law in order to produce a gospel people who will be a light to the nations because of their distinctiveness and a gospel people who will believe in Christ and have persuasions of his grace through the ceremonies that God has given to them to indicate that he is sending a Savior to them. The laws that were delivered on Mount Sinai, do they not predate the exodus every one of them being written into the fiber of creation so that the only thing that is new is the fullness of the revelation and the intensity of the application.

And you find this same thing when you come over through the pages of Old Testament history when the covenant of Sinai lies trodden under the feet of men in 1000 pieces. What happens? God comes through his prophets and calls his people back to the Sinaitic covenant. This is the key to the exegesis and exposition of all prophecy, the historical prophetic books and the books that we commonly call the books of the prophets. The key is that God is calling his people back to his covenant at Sinai. And it is in the midst of that that God reveals that he will make a new covenant.

But what is it that is most characteristic of the new covenant? It is that in those days, says the Lord, “I will put my law within them and I will write it upon their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people.” Not only promised, beloved, in Jeremiah 31:31-33, but concerned in the epistle to the Hebrews as the true nature of the new covenant, the law of God written in the heart of the child of God. And the only law to which that refers is no Novemalogue under the sun, but the Decalogue given at Sinai which was the republication of those gracious gifts and directions God had given to his people in the Garden of Eden.

And the significance of these words should never be underestimated for they concern that all progressive revelation echoes prior revelation. It is his law that God puts in his people’s hearts in the new covenant. This is the new covenant in the blood of Christ and its fruit founded now not only on what God has done in creation or what God has done in Exodus, but founded now on a firmer and a surer foundation in the blood letting of the Son of God upon Mount Calvary.

And, you see, it is this frame work of the history of redemption. So often isn’t it true those who espouse an Antinomian position exegetically say of the Westminster Confession’s position, “You don’t understand the place of the law in redemptive history.” And yet, you see, the accusation is the other way around. As we would say, the boot is on

the other foot. It is a failure to see the connection of things that God has joined together. And it is when we see that, when we see this basic framework, we recognize the rightness of the classical three fold division of the law into moral and civil and ceremonial. Besides this law commonly called moral, says the confession of faith, God was pleased to give the people of Israel and the Church and their age ceremonial laws containing several typical laws and this is partly of worship prefiguring Christ, his grace, his actions, sufferings and benefits and partly holding forth diverse instructions of moral duties. To them also as a body politic he gave sundry judicial laws.

Now this is the cornerstone of their foreign view of the position of the law of God and it is often said, isn't it, that this is the division of which the Old Testament knows nothing. How can you read the prophets and say they knew nothing about this? How can you even, speaking as the mouthpieces of God, saying, "In God's name"? It is not sacrifice and burnt offering that comes first, but obedience that comes first.

Were they so blind they couldn't see the distinction in the things that God had made to differ? And yet, of course, there is a certain necessity about the apparent uniformity of the law for these people under the Old Testament because that is what they were under. It was the picture of salvation. They had no other. It was the rule of life. They had no other. It was the means by which they would be trained to be the people of God. There was no other way. They could thus be trained.

And yet here we see this glorious parallel between the prophecy of the Old Testament and the law of the Old Testament. The prophecy of the Old Testament spoke about a Christ who had come to save his people. But it was only in the light of his coming that men began to see that as the prophecies of his coming passed through the prism of his presence, though his prophecies were broken up into his first coming and his return, only in the light of his coming could it be seen that he was the end of all the prophecies, both those referring to his incarnation and suffering and those referring to his coming again.

Well, the same is true of the law. It is only in the light of Christ that we fully and finally see that there were dimensions of the law that were applications of the Decalogue in order to restrain the people as a people unto God, a light to the Gentiles. There were applications of the law that were given in order that in the days of promise men might have hope in the ceremonies of a coming Savior who would deliver them from sin and guilt so that in Christ, as he fulfills and embodies all dimensions of the law it is of the very essence of the case that the ceremonial law which is fulfilled in his blood is ceremonial no longer. The civil law which applies to a special nation can be civil no longer because Christ has broken out of the bounds and the bands that God had hedged around his people, but he himself has become the light of the world.

But as the perfect embodiment of the moral law of God, bidding us to follow his example and be obedient to his commands, he places as a yoke upon our shoulders the Decalogue of God and says, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light and if you love me you will joyfully keep my commandments."

And Ephesians 2:15-16 and Colossians 2:14-17 clearly demonstrate to us that civil and ceremonial find their fulfillment and their abrogation in Christ. And Romans 8:3-4 clearly demonstrates that that which is moral fulfilled in Christ's active and passive obedience as being fulfilled the great hand of the blood letting of our Lord Jesus Christ is that his fulfillment of the law of God might be repeated in ours.

And so it is in Christ that we truly see the end of the law and that is why Paul says, "Do we abrogate the law by teaching faith in Christ? No," he says, "We strengthen it. For Christ did not come to abolish it, but to fulfill it so that it might be fulfilled in us." And that is why in Romans 13:8-10, Ephesians 6:1 and in other places in other apostolic writings the apostles are able to speak about the continuing and abiding relevance of the law of God in the life of the believer.

The Old Testament saints saw in the law Christ and embraced his commands. He knew that he was not under a covenant works, but he rejoiced in the law as the rule of his life and praise God for the power he gave him to love him and obey him. It should not, therefore surprise us or grieve us to think that the New Testament believer also learns to see Christ in the law. He sees it with his brothers and sisters before Christ's coming as the rule of his life. He sees with Calvin that Christ is the life of the law. He sees that without Christ there is no life in the law. He sees that the law itself is full of life. He sees that he can appreciate the clarity of the law only when he gazes fully into Christ's face, but when he does gaze into the law, he sees something of the unveiled face of his Lord Jesus Christ. And so he thrills to its clarity. He rejoices in its depth of exposition. He seeks the Spirit's guidance for its application and for no other reason could he say with the apostle Paul that he was εννομος χριστω, in law to Christ through the gospel.

He could have said, of course, that he was in grace to Christ and every Antinomian who is of a breed in the face of the earth could have said amen, but must not silence Paul when Paul says that what he is in to Christ is the law.

You see, at the end of the day, Antinomianism is forced into the position that law in the Old Testament always involves Legalism. But in some way or another the Mosaic law was a covenant of works, a way of justification. And that is often so because in his heart of hearts the Antinomian is a Legalist in disguise, trying to struggle free from his awful bonded spirit and yet, you see, he is mistaken when he binds his legal heart with the chains of Antinomianism. He becomes like the people of Gadara who bound the man possessed with cords of rope and chains of metal, for no natural power can ever chain the legal spirit, only grace, only the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, brethren, I say, again, to you that the Marrow controversy resolved itself into the controversy of Jesus and the Pharisees to whom he told this story of a certain man who had two sons, an Antinomian prodigal and who when awakened was tempted to Legalism.

"I will go and be a slave in my Father's house."

And a legalistic elder brother who thirsted for the Antinomian ventures of his younger brother. Oh, to have a fling like the fling of my brother and to be free from this awful yoke of my father's law. And between them stood the father of mercies and grace offering to both free grace, grace which would make a son obedient to his father's law, grace which would give him a liberty in his spirit to be obedient with a thankful rather than with a servile heart, free grace which would produce evangelical obedience and true joy in the father's law as the gracious rule for all his life.

May God help us together so rightly to divide the Word of truth that we may escape from Antinomianism on the one hand and Legalism on the other and know what it is to be welcomed at the end into our Father's house and embrace in that day when we shall all know the liberty of the joy of the children of God. May God bless his Word. Amen.