

# Protestant Antinomianism

## INTRODUCTION

Jesus often used the metaphor of fruit bearing as a way of distinguishing between true and false believers. He did this with regard to the parable of the soils in which only the fourth soil produced fruit (Mt 13:23; Mk 4:20; Lk 8:15); He did this with regard to trees and their fruit (Mt 7:15–20; 12:33; Lk 6:43–45); and He did this when describing the fruit that remains because of its connection to the vine (Jn 15:2, 5, 8, 16). It is clear when considering passages like these that Jesus expected His children to bear fruit, i.e., to persevere in the faith.

Jesus is not the only one in the NT to make this point. Indeed, we could consider statements made by Paul (e.g. Rom 6:21; 7:6; Phil 1:6; Eph 2:10), Peter (1 Pet 1:6–8; 2 Pet 1:5–11), James (Jas 2:17), and John (1 John 2:3–6; 4:7–21; 5:6–7) that back up what Jesus taught: true Christians will persevere in the faith unto the end.<sup>1</sup>

These assertions by Jesus and the apostles are given to us in the indicative mood, and as such constitute true realities for every Christian.<sup>2</sup> However, the Christian's perseverance is not automatic, nor does it guarantee instant perfection from the point at which one is justified. Not only does the Christian's experience validate this fact, but Scripture also lends its voice with hundreds of imperatives, calling the believer to obey and to persevere. Rolland McCune summarizes the situation well: "If it is true that a believer *will* persevere [in the faith], then it is equally true that he *must* persevere."<sup>3</sup> Three examples of this indicative-imperative tension communicate this truth: Phil 2:12–13 ("work out your salvation . . . for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure"); 1 John 3:14–18 ("We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. . . . Let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth"); Jude 1, 21 ("To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ. . . . Keep yourselves in the love of God").

Christians have often wrestled with this indicative-imperative tension as they "strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). And on this

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<sup>1</sup>The Westminster Confession of Faith (17.1) defines perseverance, "They whom God hath accepted in His Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally or finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved."

<sup>2</sup>I have simplified the definition of the indicative here, recognizing that technically, the indicative is not the mood of certainty as much as it is the mood of the *presentation* of certainty. See Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Zondervan, 1996), 448.

<sup>3</sup>Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity* (3 vols; Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010) 3:181.

road of progressive sanctification a major challenge is balancing the Scripture's teaching about the indicatives and imperatives. An overemphasis in either direction can result in a tumble into the legalism or moralism ditch if the imperatives become the focus or into the antinomianism or quietism ditch if the indicatives take center stage.

While it is true that conservative Christians in some sectors of the evangelical world (e.g. some strident fundamentalists?) slip into the imperative ditch and therefore teach a form of legalism,<sup>4</sup> some have fallen into the indicative ditch and proclaim a type of antinomianism.<sup>5</sup> This latter group in an ironic twist has taken the indicative statements about perseverance in the Bible (e.g. God promises that His children will bear fruit), and in their writing and practice have denied the necessity of perseverance in the life of the believer, essentially asserting that believers do not necessarily bear fruit!<sup>6</sup> They have done this by de-emphasizing the imperatives of Scripture to the point of reducing them to merely passive concepts, and they have effectively negated the Bible's call for "Spirit-powered, gospel-driven, faith-fueled effort."<sup>7</sup>

Sadly, in recent years three streams of antinomian teaching have come to light, and they flow out of three different models of sanctification teaching. But before delineating these streams, I must take a brief foray into the world of sanctification models.

Following the pattern first laid out in *Five Views on Sanctification*, five schools of sanctification teaching generally make up the landscape: Wesleyan, Keswick, Pentecostal, Chaferian, and Reformed.<sup>8</sup> Each of these views has particular points of emphasis, especially

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<sup>4</sup>"Legalism happens when *what we need to do*, not what Jesus has already done, becomes the end game," Tullian Tchividjian, *Jesus + Nothing = Everything* (Crossway, 2011), 46. Tchividjian also coins the term *performancism* to describe this type of approach to Christian growth. Ryan Haskins, Jeremy Litts, Jon Moffitt, and Byron Yawn (a.k.a. "The Boys") refer to legalism/moralism as *pietism* in their book, *A Primer on Pietism: Its Characteristics and Inevitable Impact on the Christian Life* (Theocast, Inc., 2017). Also, Jon Moffitt, Justin Perdue, and Jeremy Buehler, *Faith vs Faithfulness: A Primer on Rest* (Theocast, Inc., 2019).

<sup>5</sup>Robert A. Pyne, "Antinomianism and Dispensationalism," *BSac* 153 (April–June 1996): 141, defines antinomianism as "endorsing lawless behavior." Two helpful summaries of antinomianism can be found in Sinclair Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Crossway, 2016), 137–54; and Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?* (P & R Publishing, 2013), 1–18.

<sup>6</sup>The bases for arguing in this antinomian direction vary from group to group. Reasons for denying perseverance include a desire to give assurance, to avoid sully grace, not wanting to add to faith, or not wanting to be placed under the Mosaic Law (to name a few).

<sup>7</sup>Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness* (Crossway, 2012), 79.

<sup>8</sup>Melvin Dieter, ed., *Five Views on Sanctification* (Zondervan, 1987). This book uses these five categories but labels one the "Augustinian-Dispensational View." This unhelpful label used by John F. Walvoord, who penned that chapter, was called the "Chaferian" view by Charles Ryrie, "Contrasting Views on Sanctification," in *Walvoord: A Tribute* (ed. Donald K. Campbell; Moody Press, 1982), 189–200, and this is the preferable term.

related to the initiation of sanctification (e.g. does God begin His work of producing fruit immediately after regeneration or does He wait for man to begin the process?) and the degree to which God and man are involved in the ongoing growth of the Christian. For our purposes, these five models provide a helpful platform from which to consider antinomian teaching.

The current antinomian river flowing through American evangelicalism can trace its origins to three tributaries, each of which comes out of a different model of sanctification instruction. The first stream, based in the Chaferian model, is Free Grace theology.<sup>9</sup> Second, Pentecostalism has given birth to hyper-grace teaching.<sup>10</sup> Third, the Reformed model has produced a difficult-to-label group of antinomians, and it is this third stream that I would like to introduce and evaluate in this essay.<sup>11</sup>

I shall proceed by considering first the *naming* of this Reformed-based grace teaching. Second, I will move from naming to the *history* of this teaching. Third, I will advance from history to the *doctrinal teaching* itself. Finally, I will compare this doctrinal teaching with the concept of perseverance and tease out some implications.

### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

At the outset I encounter the challenge of naming this group.<sup>12</sup> Since this group has been speaking and writing about their focus for less than fifteen years, neither its proponents nor its opponents have yet to develop an official name for it. Indeed, Zane Hodges had been writing and speaking about Free Grace for at least 15 years prior to the establishment of the Grace Evangelical Society, so it should not surprise us that the group I

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A year after Dieter's book, *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, ed. Donald L. Alexander (IVP, 1988) appeared. It included chapters on Lutheran and Contemplative models in place of the Keswick and Chaferian models. Technically, the Lutheran view (penned by Gerhard Forde) should be taken as a subset of the Reformed view (differing especially on the "third use of the Law") while the Contemplative view (by Glenn Hinson) is too enigmatic and quirky to be considered as a definable model. Another excellent historical survey is found in William W. Combs, "The Disjunction Between Justification and Sanctification in Contemporary Evangelical Theology," *DBSJ* 6 (Fall 2001): 17–33.

<sup>9</sup>See Jon Pratt, "The Free Grace Movement and Perseverance," Bible Faculty Summit, August, 2019.

<sup>10</sup>Michael L. Brown, *Hyper-Grace: Exposing the Dangers of the Modern Grace Message* (Charisma House, 2014); Vinson Synan, ed., *The Truth about Grace* (Charisma House, 2018).

<sup>11</sup>Unlike the Free Grace and the hyper-grace movements, this group is still in its formative stages and has no identifying name. See the discussion below.

<sup>12</sup>I was first apprised of this group through a presentation by Pastor Gary Gilley at the national IFCA conference in South Bend, IN (June, 2018). He used the phrase "Liberate Theology" to describe the group, based upon the Liberate Conference that was hosted by Tullian Tchividjian and held in Fort Lauderdale, FL from 2012–2015. Due to the fact that the Liberate Network was dissolved in 2017, I think a different name would better describe the group. Also see Gilley's website, [www.tottministries.org](http://www.tottministries.org) and his 3-part series of articles: "Sanctification Debates: Parts 1–3," *Think on These Things* 24.1–3 (Jan–June 2018).

will discuss does not have a clear identity, a clear leader, or any particularly clear doctrinal statement. Furthermore, the broad range of denominational representatives who write and speak about this subject mean that an identifying name is unlikely to be forthcoming.<sup>13</sup>

This reality notwithstanding, several have attempted to label this teaching. One might consider Jen Wilkin's suggestion, "celebratory failurism," a bit too pejorative.<sup>14</sup> Gerhard Forde proposed, "radical Lutheranism,"<sup>15</sup> but this is a bit too narrow, considering the significant number of non-Lutherans who fit under this group's umbrella. Another option—"confessionalism"—offered by "The Boys" is too general to be helpful.<sup>16</sup>

So lacking any particularly appropriate name, I will label this group *Protestant Antinomianism*. Why *Protestant* rather than Reformed, especially since I have suggested above that this school of thought comes out of the Reformed model of sanctification? Models of sanctification are not the same category as systems of theology, and there is enough difference between Presbyterians and Lutherans and Anglicans that using the label, Reformed, to describe these systems would be confusing and inaccurate.<sup>17</sup> Better is the term, *Protestant*, for it adequately identifies the theological origins of all the writers we will consider.

In using the label, *Antinomianism*, I know that most of the writers discussed below would disavow such a connection,<sup>18</sup> and in the historical sense they would be correct.<sup>19</sup> But

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<sup>13</sup>In the literature I have read the proponents come from Lutheran, Presbyterian, Anglican, Baptist, and non-denominational churches.

<sup>14</sup>Jen Wilkin, "Failure is not a Virtue," (May 1, 2014) <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/failure-is-not-a-virtue/> (accessed 6/24/2021).

<sup>15</sup>Gerhard O. Forde, *A More Radical Gospel: Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism* (ed. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson; Eerdmans, 2004), 7, writes: "My thesis is that Lutherans . . . should become even more radical proponents of the tradition that gave them birth and has brought them thus far. . . . Let us be radicals: not conservatives or liberals, fundagelicals or charismatics (or whatever other brand of something-less-than gospel entices), but radicals: radical preachers and practitioners of the gospel by justification by faith without the deeds of the law." Note that this chapter is a reprint of an essay that first appeared as "Radical Lutheranism: Lutheran Identity in America," *LQ* 1 (1987): 5–18.

<sup>16</sup>Haskins, Litts, Moffitt, and Yawn, *A Primer on Pietism: Its Characteristics and Inevitable Impact on the Christian Life*, 11; idem, *A Pilgrim's Guide to Rest* (Theocast, Inc., 2018), 8; and Moffitt, Perdue, and Buehler, *Faith vs Faithfulness*, 4–5.

<sup>17</sup>Going back to the Reformation, Lutheranism can be traced to Luther, Reformed theology to Calvin and Zwingli, and Anglicanism to the Elizabethan settlement. And these all differed enough that none would have happily accepted the identifying labels of the others.

<sup>18</sup>Paul F. M. Zahl, *Grace in Practice: A Theology of Everyday Life* (Eerdmans, 2007), 34–35, and William McDavid, Ethan Richardson, and David Zahl, *Law and Gospel: A Theology for Sinners (and Saints)* (Mockingbird Ministries, 2015), 89–91, are two examples.

<sup>19</sup>See note 5.

the English language has no better word to describe this group's anti-law orientation, so I will be using this term while acknowledging its historical and theological baggage.<sup>20</sup>

Now that we have settled the question of nomenclature, we move next to the history of Protestant Antinomianism.

### A HISTORY OF PROTESTANT ANTINOMIANISM

This historical survey will include an investigation of the origins, proponents, and writings of Protestant Antinomianism (PA).

**The Origins of Protestant Antinomianism.** Of the many theological challenges confronting the reformers in the sixteenth century, the distinction between Law and Gospel as it relates to the doctrine of justification was certainly near the top of the list. The Reformers taught that Law could never save but rather served to make demands that could never be met; Law corresponds to the effort of doing good works as a way of gaining favor with God, something which could never occur since justification can never be attained by works (Rom 3:28; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8–9). On the other hand, Gospel speaks of the free gift of grace given to the sinner by faith; absolutely no effort or good works are required for justification because Christ's righteousness is imputed to the ungodly as a gift (Rom 3:24–26).<sup>21</sup>

Thus, we should never mix Law and Gospel when calling a sinner to repentance. The unbeliever can receive justification by faith alone (Gospel) apart from any works (Law). Likely, every believer in the audience affirms this great truth of keeping Law and Gospel separate when speaking of our justification. But how do these two ideas relate to the believer's progressive sanctification? Does the Law have any connection to Gospel when speaking of the believer's growth in holiness *after* his justification? Indeed, if the Reformers believed that the Law says *do* while the Gospel says *done*, how do these two concepts relate to the numerous imperatives found in the New Testament? While Luther and Calvin differed a bit in how they articulated the place of Law in the believer's life, they agreed that obedience to the moral law was necessary. The Westminster Confession of Faith (19.6) clearly affirms, "Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly." Calvin referred to this function of the Law as the "third use" of the Law.<sup>22</sup> And so a basic tenet of the Reformers is an explanation and endorsement of how the

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<sup>20</sup>I was convinced of the validity of the term "Antinomianism" to describe this group by Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?* (P & R Publishing, 2013). While this book is more an exploration and explanation of the Antinomian controversies in Luther's day, in English Puritanism, and in the early American colonies, it provides great insight into the anti-nomistic teaching of the group we are considering.

<sup>21</sup>Myron Houghton, *Law and Grace* (Regular Baptist Press, 2011), 9, explains this distinction well: "The law makes demands while the gospel does not make any demands. In other words, the law says *do*, while the gospel says *done* (emphasis in original)."

<sup>22</sup>Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.12, "The third and principal use [of the law], which pertains more closely to the proper purpose of the law, finds its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns." Lutheran scholars have debated whether or not Luther held to the third use of the law, but Edward A. Englebrecht, "Luther's

moral law (the ceremonial and civil aspects of the law are abrogated with the coming of Christ) ought to function as a “means of sanctification” in the life of the believer.<sup>23</sup>

Since this connection of Law and Gospel in relation to sanctification is so readily affirmed by Protestants, we can understand how people growing up in circles where the third use of the Law is taught could easily slip into a form of merit-based performance in their efforts to grow in sanctification. And it is the desire to correct this faulty practice that has generated the existence and development of its opposing but equally as errant nemesis, PA.

Based on the books and blogs I have read there are three antecedent influences behind the current form of PA. First, we have “Radical Lutheranism,” particularly indebted to theologian Gerhard Forde (1927–2005) who coined the phrase.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, Forde decried historical Antinomianism, but it appears that some of his provocative comments about sanctification (e.g. “Sanctification is a matter of being grasped by the unconditional grace of God and having now to live in that light. It is a matter of getting used to our justification.”<sup>25</sup>)

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Threefold Use of the Law,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 75 (2011): 135–50, shows that Luther held to the third use of the law as seen in a Christmas sermon (1522) and in a lecture on 1 Timothy 1:8–9 (1528). Also see Houghton, *Law and Grace*, 10, and Mark Jones, *Antinomianism*, 3–5.

<sup>23</sup>Sinclair Ferguson, “The Reformed View,” in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, 68–71. Similarly, we see the same kind of treatment of Calvin’s third use of the law in two other “five views” books: Anthony A. Hoekema, “The Reformed Perspective,” in *Five Views on Sanctification*, 59–90; and Willem A. VanGemeren, “The Law is the Perfection of Righteousness in Jesus Christ: A Reformed Perspective,” in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian: Five Views* (ed. Wayne Strickland; Zondervan, 1993), 13–58.

<sup>24</sup>Forde, “Radical Lutheranism,” *LQ* 1 (1987): 5–18.

<sup>25</sup>Gerhard O. Forde, “The Lutheran View,” in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, (ed. Donald Alexander; IVP, 1988), 22–23. See also Gerhard O. Forde, *A More Radical Gospel: Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism* (ed. Mark Mattes and Steven Paulson; Eerdmans, 2004); and idem, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* (Eerdmans, 1997).

Mickey L. Mattox, review of *On Being a Theologian of the Cross: Reflections on Luther’s Heidelberg Disputation, 1518* by Gerhard Forde, *JETS* 42.3 (1999): 537, aptly describes Forde’s theology of the cross: “Forde not only allows Luther’s assessment of the human condition apart from grace to do its work, but also lays out in clearest terms Luther’s understanding of the wondrous promises of the Gospel. Only when God has become our most relentless enemy and truly slain us with the Law does he raise us up to new life by means of the Word. In both cases, as Forde points out, it is God who takes the initiative; the sinner suffers both the condemnation of the Law and the promise of the Gospel as realities given from without. In this sense, one can speak of being a theologian of the cross only as one created by God, and not of becoming one as if it could be done through the exercise of some innate human capacity. To see things as they are, to know the self as put to death by God and raised to life by that same God, is itself a gift of God. This

have served as fodder for PA.<sup>26</sup> Second, we have the Anglican influence of Paul F. M. Zahl and Robert Farrar Capon, both Episcopal priests, who emphasized the freeing power of grace to the detriment of the enslaving nature of the law.<sup>27</sup> Third, we have statements about grace and law from the Reformed confessions (e.g. Westminster Confession of Faith, London Baptist Confession, etc.), Luther and Calvin themselves, and modern Reformed scholars which are used to downplay the importance of obedience to the imperatives while emphasizing the significance of the indicatives.<sup>28</sup>

**The Proponents and Writings of Protestant Antinomianism.** Before his disqualification from ministry,<sup>29</sup> Tullian Tchividjian exercised a huge influence in organizing support for PA. Tullian, the grandson of Billy Graham, took over as senior pastor at Coral Ridge Presbyterian, following D. James Kennedy. This move also included a merger of churches as Tullian's church, New City Presbyterian, united with Coral Ridge in 2009. Between 2005 and 2015 he published eight books, but the two that contributed to his understanding of PA in regard to sanctification were *Jesus + Nothing = Everything* (2011) and *One Way Love* (2013).<sup>30</sup> He also blogged regularly on The Gospel Coalition website ([www.thegospelcoalition.org](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org)) until he was removed due to "an increasingly strident debate going on around the issue of sanctification."<sup>31</sup> Just prior to his removal a spirited exchange had been engaged between Tullian and Kevin DeYoung over the issue of sanctification I am

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knowledge in turn enables the Christian to distinguish between theologies of glory and the theology of the cross."

<sup>26</sup>Michael Allen, *Sanctification* (New Studies in Dogmatics; Zondervan, 2017), 30 n.15, writes: "The Radical Lutheranism of Forde . . . has exercised wider influence at the popular level in recent years, connecting to a number of Presbyterian or Reformed ministries (e.g., Tullian Tchividjian), to so-called reformational Anglican circles (e.g., Mockingbird), and elsewhere."

<sup>27</sup>Zahl, *Grace in Practice*, 26–41; idem, *Who Will Deliver Us? The Present Power of the Death of Christ* (reprint, Seabury Press, 1983; Wipf & Stock, 2008), and Robert Farrar Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment: Paradox, Outrage, and Vindication in the Parables of Jesus* (Eerdmans, 2002).

<sup>28</sup>Moffitt et al, *Faith vs Faithfulness*, 4, state: "We do look back to the confessions of faith that were produced during the era of the Reformation. These confessions arose, as confessions typically do, because theological clarity was required. The Reformation was a response to the rampant moralism and works-based system of the medieval church. Therefore, the confessions that were produced out of it push back against moralism."

<sup>29</sup>Tullian Tchividjian resigned from Coral Ridge Presbyterian in June, 2015 after admitting to an extramarital affair; he was deposed by the South Florida presbytery of the PCA in August, 2015; and he was fired from Willow Creek Church in March, 2016, following news of a second extramarital affair. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tullian\\_Tchividjian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tullian_Tchividjian) (accessed 7/26/21).

<sup>30</sup>Tchividjian, *Jesus + Nothing = Everything*; and idem, *One Way Love* (David C. Cook, 2013).

<sup>31</sup>Don Carson, "On Some Recent Changes at TGC," May 21, 2014 (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/on-some-recent-changes-at-tgc/>) (accessed 7/22/2021). Carson also stated, "The differences were doctrinal and probably even more matters of pastoral practice and wisdom."



discussing in this paper.<sup>32</sup> Besides his writing Tullian also hosted an annual conference at his church from 2012–2015 entitled “Liberate.” Speakers included Steve Brown, Matt Chandler, Elyse Fitzpatrick, Ray Ortlund, Paul Tripp, Michael Horton, and Bryan Chapell. The conference led to the formation of the Liberate network, which would likely have grown into an organization similar to 9Marks, The Gospel Coalition, or the Grace Evangelical Society. However, when Tullian confessed to an extra-marital affair in 2015, the network closed up shop within months of its beginning in 2016.<sup>33</sup> Incidentally, Tullian has remarried (August 2016) and stepped back into pastoral ministry at *The Sanctuary*, an unaffiliated church in Jupiter, FL, he started in September 2019.

While Tullian was certainly the most vocal and popular face of PA from 2011–2015, there were certainly others who advocated the same theological ideas and who continue to do so. Allow me to introduce “The Boys,” a group of four pastors and church planters from the Nashville, TN area: Byron Yawn, Ryan Haskins, Jeremy Litts, and Jon Moffitt. They published two books: *A Primer on Pietism: Its Characteristics and Inevitable Impact on the Christian Life* (2017) and *A Pilgrim’s Guide to Rest* (2018).<sup>34</sup> They also produced a weekly podcast from Dec 2015 – June 2019, dealing with subjects like sanctification, assurance, law and gospel, Reformed theology, and “Pietism.”<sup>35</sup> These and other resources were available through their website, [www.theocast.org](http://www.theocast.org). Sadly, in the spring of 2019, the leader of the group, Byron Yawn, was disqualified from ministry due to moral failure; oversight of the website then fell to Jon Moffitt. Ryan Haskins and Jeremy Litts stepped away to concentrate on their church ministries, and Moffitt, who continues to pastor in Nashville, was joined by Justin Perdue and Jimmy Buehler on the weekly podcasts, trumpeting the same message as before.<sup>36</sup> While the *Primer* and *Pilgrim’s Guide* are no longer available, Moffitt, Perdue, and Buehler have co-authored two new books: *Faith vs Faithfulness: A Primer on Rest* and *Safe in Christ: A Primer on Assurance*,<sup>37</sup> and the three pastors have continued a weekly podcast from July 2019 up to the present.

Another strain of PA can be found at [www.trueface.org](http://www.trueface.org). This organization is led by John Lynch, Bruce McNicol, and Bill Thrall. These three have collaborated on Trueface’s

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<sup>32</sup>While all blogposts of Tullian Tchividjian have been removed from the TGC website, DeYoung’s are still accessible. See this blogpost which gives some background to the situation: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/what-we-all-agree-on-and-what-we-probably-dont-in-this-sanctification-debate/> (accessed 7/22/21)

<sup>33</sup>See n. 29.

<sup>34</sup>Both books are jointly authored by all four men and published by Theocast, Inc. Apparently, both are now out of print, though they can still be purchased on Amazon.

<sup>35</sup>Pietism, according to The Boys, is synonymous with moralism or legalism; it is preoccupied with the interior of the Christian life; its main focus is on the *duty* of the Christian above all other realities; it believes that *obligation* precedes *assurance*; and it is heavy on the imperatives of Scripture. All these phrases come from Ryan Haskins, Jeremy Litts, Jon Moffitt, and Byron Yawn, *A Primer on Pietism* (Theocast, Inc., 2017), 8–17.

<sup>36</sup>Justin Perdue pastors Covenant Baptist Church in Asheville, NC and Jimmy Buehler pastors Christ Community Church in Willmar, MN.

<sup>37</sup>Moffitt et al, *Faith vs Faithfulness* (Theocast, 2019) and Moffitt et al, *Safe in Christ: A Primer on Assurance* (Theocast, 2020).



most important book *The Cure*.<sup>38</sup> While Trueface is not as theologically driven as Liberate or Theocast, the group still emphasizes God's grace and acceptance while denigrating the kind of moralism that tempts Christians to keep striving to please God.

Three organizations, each of which provides written resources (blogs and books), podcasts, and national and regional conferences, strongly emphasize PA. Note the mission statements of each: [www.1517.org](http://www.1517.org) – “To declare and defend the Good News that we are forgiven and free on account of Christ alone”<sup>39</sup>; Mockingbird – “Behind our entire project lies the conviction that none of us ever move beyond our need to hear the basic good news of God's Grace”<sup>40</sup>; Lark – “Empowering a global conversation about God's Scandalous Grace.”<sup>41</sup>

1517.org has few qualms in admitting its Lutheran roots and connection to Forde's radical Lutheranism.<sup>42</sup> The staff and scholars associated with 1517 include Scott Keith, Ron Rosenblatt, John Warwick Montgomery, Chad Bird, and Daniel Van Voorhis.<sup>43</sup>

Mockingbird claims to have no formal denominational affiliation, but its founder, David Zahl serves on the staff of an Episcopal church and the website ([www.mbird.com](http://www.mbird.com)) features a podcast with David and his two brothers, John and Simeon, who are the sons of Paul Zahl, an Episcopal priest. Furthermore, of the 30 books for sale on the site, half are written by one of the Zahls or Robert Capon, another Episcopal priest. The signature book of the website is *Law and Gospel*, which clearly demonstrates the main themes of PA which will be delineated below.<sup>44</sup>

Lark was founded by Russ Johnson in 2014 and originally was called The Table Network before changing its name to Lark and the Lark Collective in 2021.<sup>45</sup> Shortly after its founding, Tony Sorci joined Johnson, and they have labored together, creating a network

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<sup>38</sup>John Lynch, Bruce McNicol, Bill Thrall, *The Cure* (Trueface, 2011). A lot of the concepts found in this book first appeared in Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol, and John Lynch, *TrueFaced* (NavPress, 2004), which appears to be out of print but can still be purchased on Amazon.

<sup>39</sup><https://www.1517.org/about>. Accessed 7/22/21.

<sup>40</sup><https://mbird.com/about/history-and-mission/>. Accessed 7/22/21.

<sup>41</sup><https://larksite.com/about>. Accessed 7/22/21.

<sup>42</sup>On a personal note I attended a 1517 conference in Burnsville, MN in 2019. I was intrigued by a sticker on Scott Keith's laptop, which he clearly displayed during his session: “Forde Lives.” Gerhard Forde died in 2005!

<sup>43</sup>There are too many books to list other than to note that the website has over 30 of Montgomery's books for sale as well as several titles by Chad Bird. Of particular interest in regard to PA see Chad Bird, *Upside-Down Spirituality: The 9 Essential Failures of a Faithful Life* (Baker, 2019), and idem, *Your God is Too Glorious: Finding God in the Most Unexpected Places* (Baker, 2018).

<sup>44</sup>William McDavid, Ethan Richardson, David Zahl, *Law and Gospel: A Theology for Sinners (and Saints)* (Mockingbird Ministries, 2015).

<sup>45</sup>Lark is the general name of this non-profit organization, “a teaching ministry seeking to empower a global conversation about God's scandalous grace” (<https://larksite.com/faq>). The Lark Collective is the name of the network of individuals and churches who “want to join in the spread of God's scandalous grace among friends” (<https://larksite.com/about>).

of fellowships (churches?). Under the Table Network label, they published *Slow Down*.<sup>46</sup> Many of the same PA ideas from that book are found in their newest Lark publication, *Reclaim*.<sup>47</sup> A notable member of their network is The Sanctuary, pastored by Tullian Tchividjian.

Two final examples of PA come from a pastor and a professor. R. W. Glenn, a former Minnesota pastor, wrote *Crucifying Morality: The Gospel of the Beatitudes* in 2013.<sup>48</sup> And Steven Paulson, who teaches at Luther House of Study in Sioux Falls, SD, has written a 3-volume work, *Luther's Outlaw God*.<sup>49</sup> Paulson is the clear frontrunner among Lutherans who are promoting and building upon Forde's radical Lutheranism. While his 3 volumes do not necessarily deal with PA directly (and certainly not in a popular way as the many other books already mentioned in this section), they share all the qualities of Forde's project including his distinction between law and grace, his denial of the 3<sup>rd</sup> use of the law, and his theology of the cross.<sup>50</sup>

### THE TEACHING OF PROTESTANT ANTINOMIANISM

As I move to discuss the tenets of PA, I want to clarify that PA does not promote heresy and that it is well within the boundaries of orthodoxy. In fact, it points out a key problem in the lives of many Christians today—moralistic/legalistic, performance-based approaches to sanctification. PA teaches that Christians do not gain more of God's love through obedience and performance, and it reminds us that our security in Christ and assurance of salvation can never be lost despite the sins we commit after our justification.<sup>51</sup> I have found their reminders of the meaning and application of God's grace to be refreshing and convicting because it is so easy to stumble (even if absentmindedly) into the ditch of self-sufficiency and self-improvement in my personal walk with Christ. I believe that PA's emphasis on the acceptance of believers by Christ apart from any moral standard but the imputed righteousness of Christ gives freedom to those bound by pleasing man issues on the one hand and encouragement to those burdened with insecurity and fear on the other.

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<sup>46</sup>Russ Johnson, Gino Curcuruto, Tony Sorci, *Slow Down* (The Table Network, 2017). This book is still available on Amazon but is no longer on the website.

<sup>47</sup>Russ Johnson and Tony Sorci, *Reclaim* (Lark, 2021). After reading this book, I find it difficult to determine the denominational connections of Lark. The book cites Anglican, Presbyterian, and Lutheran sources, yet it seems to lean in a post-emergent-church direction (e.g. "Providing people with a place to belong on their way to belief" [112]) all the while trumpeting "reckless" (57, 119) and "indiscriminate" (81, 85, 96) grace.

<sup>48</sup>Shepherds Press, 2013.

<sup>49</sup>Steven D. Paulson, *Luther's Outlaw God: Volume 1: Hiddenness, Evil, and Predestination* (Augsburg Fortress, 2018); idem, *Luther's Outlaw God: Volume 2: Hidden in the Cross* (Augsburg Fortress, 2019); and idem, *Luther's Outlaw God: Volume 3: Sacraments and God's Attack on the Promise* (Augsburg Fortress, 2021).

<sup>50</sup>See note 25 for a description of Forde's theology of the cross. For a critique of this view of Lutheran theology see Christopher D. Jackson, *Pro Ecclesia* 29.3 (2020): 336–51. For a critique of Forde's view of the Law see Jack Kilcrease, "Gerhard Forde's Doctrine of the Law: A Confessional Lutheran Critique," *Concordian Lutheran Quarterly* 75 (2011): 151–79, and Engelbrecht, "Luther's Threefold Use of the Law," 135–50.

<sup>51</sup>Gilley, IFCA National Conference presentation on Liberate Theology, 5. See n. 12.

Nonetheless, imbalance in teaching always has negative consequences, and I fear that unguarded statements and overly triumphant perspectives have resulted in a harmful de-emphasis on the imperatives of the New Testament. This defines the basic problem at issue: PA has plunged so deeply into the indicative ditch of sanctification that their followers are finding it difficult to see, much less embrace, the importance of the imperatives on the other side of the road.

**What is the Problem?** In treating the teaching of PA I will first consider the problem PA is seeking to address, and then discuss the solution its proponents offer to that problem. **First**, what is the problem? Though all these authors agree on the problem, they tend to use different terms and descriptions to define it. For Johnson and Sorci, it is “moralism” taught by the “Church [which is] a place of performance and challenge” and emphasizes “personal morality.”<sup>52</sup> For Glenn, the problem is “reading texts that *are not commandments* as though they are” (emphasis in original), and turning them into “moralistic teaching.”<sup>53</sup> The Boys from Nashville refer to this problem as “Pietism.” Unfortunately, they take a circuitous route to describe what they mean by the term. It is “that approach to Christianity that is preoccupied with the interior of the Christian life.” Or it is “a commitment to the spirituality and moral progress of the individual Christian.” Or this: “Progress in the Christian life is its *summum bonum*. *Should* is pietism’s main focus” (emphasis in original). Finally, “Pietism has committed itself to placing the *duty of the Christian* above all other realities” (emphasis in original).<sup>54</sup> The authors of *The Cure* use an allegory to compare the two different ways that Christians approach their walk with God. They either live in the Room of Grace or in the Room of Good Intentions; it is problematic to live in the second room. Those in the Room of Good Intentions live by the 2 mottoes hanging on the wall in the room: “Striving hard to be all God wants me to be” and “Working on my sin to achieve an intimate relationship with God.” We can summarize this with the formula “More right behavior + Less wrong behavior = Godliness.”<sup>55</sup> McDavid, Richardson, and Zahl call the problem, “misguided Semipelagianism” which means that “God saves us and then the work of moral progress is up to us.”<sup>56</sup> Finally, Tchividjian uses “legalism, performancism, and moralism,” but he tends to use “performancism” most frequently. He explains that performancism “happens when *what we need to do*, not what Jesus has already done, becomes the end game.” This attitude demonstrates itself in moralistic living and preaching. In regard to living, the moralist believes that his “good behavior is required to *keep* God’s favor.” In regard to preaching, moralistic sermons “provide nothing more than a ‘to do’ list, strengthening our bondage to a performance-driven approach to the Christian life. It’s all law (what we must do) and no gospel (what Jesus has done).”<sup>57</sup> There are three results that occur when performancism is one’s manner of approach to the

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<sup>52</sup>Johnson and Sorci, *Reclaim*, 20, 42.

<sup>53</sup>R. W. Glenn, *Crucifying Morality: The Gospel of the Beatitudes* (Shepherds Press, 2013), 17–18.

<sup>54</sup>The Boys, *A Primer on Pietism*, 8–9.

<sup>55</sup>*The Cure*, 14–17.

<sup>56</sup>*Law & Gospel*, 68.

<sup>57</sup>Tchividjian, *Jesus + Nothing*, 46–49. Note that the emphasis on all these quotes is in the original. Also see McDavid, Richardson, and Zahl, *Law & Gospel*, 61: “‘Performancism’ is a helpful way to describe what it looks like to justify ourselves.”

Christian life: 1) we turn into complainers like the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son; 2) it obscures the goodness of the good news because most lost people think that doing good works saves them; and 3) it traps us in slavery and despair.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, the problem for Christians according to PA is that, even though believers have been justified by faith apart from works, they have slipped into a works-based approach to their sanctification, believing that their effort in doing good works will gain them greater favor with God. In other words, these moralistic, performance-based, Semipelagian Christians have fallen into the legalistic ditch of the sanctification road. This leads us to see how PA believes that this problem can be solved.

**What is the Solution?** The **second** step in our discussion of PA is to learn how these teachers believe that the problem of legalism should be resolved. In basic terms, PA teaches that believers must believe in and rest upon the indicatives of our salvation. I think we can summarize their approach to the solution under five broad ideas:

- 1) Relax and Rest! “The bottom line is this, Christian: because of Christ’s work on your behalf, God doesn’t dwell on your sin the way you do. So, relax . . . and you’ll actually start to get better.”<sup>59</sup> “The believer rests in the Father’s arms instead of laboring to climb into them. We rest knowing our status is forever fixed.”<sup>60</sup> “Christianity is about coming over and over again to rest in the life that Jesus lived and the death that he died for you as a gift of sheer grace.”<sup>61</sup>
- 2) Remember and Remind yourself! “Remembering, revisiting, and rediscovering the reality of our justification every day is the hard work we’re called to do if we’re going to grow.”<sup>62</sup> “If you continually remind yourself that you are accepted completely and solely because of the comprehensively perfect righteousness of Christ, then you can be confident that he will never reject you.”<sup>63</sup>
- 3) Trust in God and Believe the gospel! “At the core, we’re just learning to trust and depend on our new identity. We’re learning to live out of who God says we are on our worst day. So a statement like ‘It’s less important that anything gets fixed, but that nothing is hidden’ is an example of living out of our new identity.”<sup>64</sup> “Real spiritual progress happens when our typical, natural understanding of progress is rooted out. The key to Christian growth, then, is not first behaving better; it’s believing better—believing more deeply what Jesus has already accomplished.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Tchividjian, *Jesus + Nothing*, 52–54.

<sup>59</sup>Tchividjian, *Jesus + Nothing*, 184.

<sup>60</sup>The Boys, *Primer*, 25.

<sup>61</sup>Glenn, *Crucifying Morality*, 19.

<sup>62</sup>Tchividjian, “Work Hard! But in Which Direction?” TGC blogpost (June 8, 2011).

Note: it will take some work to find this blogpost since TGC has deleted all of Tullian’s posts. Find it at <https://www.theaquilareport.com/the-role-of-effort-in-sanctification-a-dialogue-between-kevin-deyoung-and-tullian-tchividjian/100/> (accessed 7/23/21). I thank Bryan Blazosky for helping to locate this exchange between Tchividjian and DeYoung.

<sup>63</sup>Glenn, *Crucifying Morality*, 64.

<sup>64</sup>Lynch, McNicol, and Thrall, *The Cure*, 84.

<sup>65</sup>Tchividjian, *Jesus + Nothing*, 172–73.

- 4) Receive Christ's work on your behalf! Using Christ's instruction about children, Johnson and Sorci say that children "are the quintessential models of reception. This example is fitting when you realize that Christ's Kingdom is all about God giving and us receiving, not us accomplishing."<sup>66</sup> "Only Christians know that the thing they so desperately need is the righteousness of Jesus, and they want to receive that gift anew every day."<sup>67</sup>
- 5) Grow in understanding the gospel! "Whatever sanctification includes, it begins with an understanding of who we are in Christ and what He has freed us from."<sup>68</sup> "The righteousness that Jesus [gives] . . . is the righteousness that you begin to possess as you grow in your understanding of what Jesus has done for you."<sup>69</sup>

These same five themes—relax, remember, trust, receive, and grow in understanding—are found again and again in PA's literature. I have limited each of the five categories to a few quotes for each; I could have given many more. You may believe that this language sounds very similar to Keswick's idea of "let go and let God." And you would be right. However, the quietism displayed in each of these instances is based upon different interests. For Keswick, letting go and letting God was the description of the crisis experience one needs to have in order to enter into the spiritual realm and out of the carnal realm; it is the ticket to the *beginning* of growth. For PA, relaxing, receiving, and so on, are behaviors that wise Christians engage in as they grow in their maturity. Since the Reformed model of sanctification assumes an inevitable connection between one's justification and sanctification, growth has already begun when faith is first exercised; the quietism enjoined merely helps to increase the growth trajectory more rapidly and to ensure that growth occurs with the proper biblical motivation.

Before proceeding to the analysis of PA I present here a number of provocative statements quite common among these writers: "*Application* is almost always a code word for *law*" (*One Way Love*, 155). In *The Cure* (22) Jesus meets the Christian: "He puts His hands on my shoulders, staring into my eyes. No disappointment. No condemnation. Only delight. Only love. He pulls me into a bear hug, so tight it knocks the breath out of me for a moment . . . After several moments, with a straight face He says, 'That is a lot of sin. A whole lot of sin. Don't you ever sleep?' He starts laughing, and I start laughing." *The Boys* (*A Pilgrim's Guide to Rest*): "Sanctification is more about not having to do what we did before and less about avoiding bad things we once did. . . . Paul never offers sanctification as the measuring stick of God's pleasure toward us" (125). "He has expressed the same love for us as His children as He does for Jesus, His only Son (John 17:20–24). That means all children at all times are equally receiving the affections of the Father as Christ receives them" (171). Robert Capon, *The Parables of Grace* (Eerdmans, 1988), "Jesus I can love. He does everything, I do nothing; I trust him. It is a nifty arrangement." Donavon Riley, "God Commands the Impossible and That's Good," blogpost, Mar 7, 2018, (accessed 7/23/21) <https://www.1517.org/articles/god-commands-the-impossible-and-thats-good>: "We are not expected to be doers of God's command, but believers in God's promise." Tullian in

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<sup>66</sup>Johnson and Sorci, *Reclaim*, 87.

<sup>67</sup>Glenn, *Crucifying Morality*, 64.

<sup>68</sup>The Boys, *A Pilgrim's Guide to Rest* (Theocast, Inc., 2018), 125.

<sup>69</sup>Glenn, *Crucifying Morality*, 105.

*Jesus +Nothing* (96): “God works *his* work in *you*, which is the work already accomplished by Christ. Our hard work, therefore, means coming to a greater understanding of *his* work.”

### PROTESTANT ANTINOMIANISM AND PERSEVERANCE

As stated above, there are aspects of this teaching that, when in balance, can provide encouragement to us in our ministries. We would be wise to ponder whether or not we give tacit approval to law-based, legalistic teaching that makes Christian living little more than rule following for the approval of God and others on the one hand or simplistic self-help lists of “be better Christians” on the other (e.g. 5 principles for Christian weight loss or 8 ways to be a better friend or 13 reasons why you shouldn’t say bad things about your pastor). Just as we are naturally inclined to think that salvation is something that can be earned by our good works, even for the justified sinner, who has come to accept the gift of faith and who has been saved by grace alone apart from works (Eph 2:8–9), we are tempted to slip into moralistic thinking when it comes to our sanctification. But I believe we are correct to raise a red flag of warning with regard to the emphases of PA as it has developed into its current form during these past 15 years or so.

I remind us of the need we have to guard the biblical doctrine of sanctification from those who would slip into imbalanced approaches. Sanctification is a work wrought by God and the believer, who produces fruit solely because the Spirit enables him to do so. This is the mystery of sanctification so clearly stated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:10 – “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.” We also see it displayed in Philippians 2:12–13 – “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

As we have considered PA and its basic perspective on sanctification, we have seen a subtle and not-so-subtle de-emphasis on the doctrine of perseverance, i.e. the truth that God will enable His children to produce good works to the end of their lives. I am making this assertion on the basis of what we saw in the previous section of this paper. We have seen that PA’s way of resolving the problem of moralistic performancism in the believer’s experience of sanctification is to relax, remember, trust, receive, and grow in understanding—all of these ideas clearly falling on the “don’t work” side of the activity spectrum (viewing the activity spectrum with “working hard” on one end and “don’t work” on the other end). This lack of emphasis on effort in the Christian life is the failure of the PA project. In light of this failure I would like to provide three personal observations before giving my conclusion.

**First**, the problem of moralism/legalism/pietism seems overblown. Certainly there are believers among us who like rules and boundaries; they like to color inside the lines; and they like clearly laid-out lists. There are also pastors who focus on the externals in their sermons and in counseling and who preach and teach in ways that reveal them to be shepherds insistent their sheep stay in line. For people bound by or who lean toward a moralistic approach to the Christian life, PA offers some very helpful reminders, particularly that the indicatives of sanctification must not be forgotten in our walk of faith. But we must also acknowledge that in most Fundamental churches and even more so in broadly Evangelical churches, the rule-keepers are in the minority. So many believers in

our churches live according to their feelings, like to color outside the lines, and do not like being told how they should live. No, it seems we struggle much more with license than with legalism. Many pastors are afraid to preach about holy living, fearing the backlash from their hearers. And as a result, our people are sometimes ignorant but probably more often happily guilt-free when it comes to making wise and discerning moral choices in their lives.

In his book, *The Hole in Our Holiness*, Kevin DeYoung gives 8 possible reasons why Christians are not apt to have a concern for holiness: 1) it was too common in the past to equate holiness with abstaining from a few taboo practices such as drinking, smoking, and dancing; godliness meant that you avoided the no-no list; 2) there is a fear that a passion for holiness makes you some kind of weird holdover from a bygone era; 3) our churches have many unregenerate persons in them; 4) our culture of cool in regard to Christian freedom often means pushing the boundaries; 5) more liberal Christians think that labeling any behavior as “ungodly” is judgmental or intolerant [I recall hearing from a friend of mine who serves as a principal in a Christian school being accused of “body-shaming” because she required the young ladies to wear modest dresses to the school-sponsored spring banquet]; 6) if we are gospel-centered we won’t talk about imperatives or moral exertion; “We know legalism (salvation by law keeping) and antinomianism (salvation without the need for law keeping) are both wrong, but antinomianism feels like a much safer danger” (19); 7) holiness is hard work and who likes hard work?; 8) many Christians have given up on sanctification; since we’re all hopeless sinners anyway why bother?<sup>70</sup> While we should acknowledge the presence of moralism among us, I believe the problem of license is a far greater problem, demanding much greater attention than the PA group is giving it.

My **second** observation: we must understand the imperatives of sanctification in order to correct the over-emphasis on the indicatives of sanctification so characteristic of PA, i.e. the best way to correct a distortion of the real thing is to understand the real thing better. Please understand that in looking more closely at the imperatives I do not want us to jump out of one ditch only to slide into the other. But so much of what is said in the PA literature either ignores these points about the imperative or caricatures them. So I would like you to consider with me the goal of the imperatives (holiness), the motivation for obeying the imperatives (a multitude of aspects), and the work of the imperatives (diligent effort).

- The Goal of the Imperatives: Holiness. If, indeed, God has called us to be holy as He is holy (1 Pet 1:15–16) we need to consider what holiness looks like. Again, DeYoung helps us by describing both the negatives (what holiness is not) and the positives (what holiness is), and I will list these here. For further explanation on each of these points, I encourage you to consult his book.<sup>71</sup> Negatively, holiness is *not* 1) merely rule keeping; 2) generational imitation; 3) generic spirituality; 4) “finding your true self”; 5) the way of the world (note: “The world provides no cheerleaders on the pathway to godliness” [p 38]). Positively, holiness looks like the following: 1) the renewal of God’s image in us (Col 3:10; 2 Cor 3:18); 2) a life marked by virtue instead of vice (see all the vice and virtue lists [e.g. Col 3:5–9; 12–15]); 3) a clean conscience (Acts 24:16; Rom 14:23); 4) obedience to God’s commands (John 14:23;

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<sup>70</sup>Kevin DeYoung, *The Hole in Our Holiness*, 17–19.

<sup>71</sup>DeYoung, *Holiness*, 33–47.



1 Jn 2:3); 5) Christlikeness (Rom 8:29) – “If somewhere down the road you forget the Ten Commandments or can’t recall the fruit of the Spirit or don’t seem to remember any particular attributes of God, you can still remember what holiness is by simply remembering [Jesus’s] name” (p 47).

- The Motivation for Obeying the Imperatives. One of the errors PA writers regularly point out is that performance-oriented Christians strive for holiness with wrong motives (e.g. pride, fear of judgment, desire to gain favor with God).<sup>72</sup> And this caution is helpful, yet Scripture gives a multitude of proper motives,<sup>73</sup> and I would like to consider the motives of rewards, God’s love for us, and pleasing God. *First*, the degree to which Christians obey corresponds with the rewards they will receive in glory.<sup>74</sup> This relates to the idea of different degrees of glory and happiness in eternity, i.e., glory will differ from saint to saint (1 Cor 3:14–15; 2 Cor 9:6; Lk 19:11–26). *Second*, Mark Jones helps us to consider the idea that the believer’s obedience relates to the “complacent” love of God such that “the more we are like God, the more love we shall have from him.”<sup>75</sup> Such verses as John 14:21–23; 15:10; Jude 21, all speak to the *increase* of God’s love for His children in the “context of ongoing communion with God and Christ” (p 86). *Third*, while there are numerous PA quotes suggesting that we can never please God by means of our post-conversion works, (e.g. *Pilgrim’s Guide to Rest*, 125: “Paul never offers sanctification as the measuring stick of God’s pleasure toward us.”), the NT makes it clear that we not only please God when we obey, but we are commanded to do so: 2 Corinthians 5:9 – “So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him”; 1 Thessalonians 4:1 – “Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more”; Jn 14:21; Rom 8:8–9; 14:18; Phil 4:18; Col 1:10; 1 Thess 2:4; 1 Tim 2:3; 5:4; Heb 11:5–6; 13:16, 21; 1 Jn 3:22; Rev 3:15–16.<sup>76</sup>
- The Effort Required by the Imperatives. Here I summarize the helpful chapter in Kevin DeYoung’s, *The Hole in our Holiness*, 79–91. He reminds us how we must work diligently in the pursuit of holiness. *First*, our effort must be Spirit-empowered in that the Spirit exposes sin so we can see it and avoid it; He illumines the Word so we can understand and apply it; and He takes the veil away so we can see the glory of

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<sup>72</sup>Tchividjian, *Jesus + Nothing*, 46.

<sup>73</sup>DeYoung, *Holiness*, 57–60. He gives a list of 40 proper motives with a corresponding verse or verses for each. He states, “As exhausting as this list might be, it could easily be doubled or tripled. God doesn’t command obedience ‘just cuz.’ He gives us dozens of specific reasons to be holy.”

<sup>74</sup>Jones, *Antinomianism*, 71–76, provides a helpful discussion of this subject, using Edwards and Turretin as his primary resources.

<sup>75</sup>Jones, *Antinomianism*, 84–87. Jones discusses the distinction between the “benevolent” love of God, which is bestowed on the elect, apart from any virtue in them, and the “complacent” love of God, which is bestowed on those whom God approves because they obey His commands. This twofold distinction of God’s love is affirmed by “literally dozens of highly regarded Reformed theologians from the Reformation and post-Reformation” (85).

<sup>76</sup>Jones, *Antinomianism*, 92–95.

Christ. *Second*, our effort must be Gospel-driven in that the Gospel encourages godliness out of a sense of gratitude for what Christ has done and in that it aids our pursuit of holiness by telling us about who we are. *Third*, our effort must be faith-fueled in that it rests on the promises God makes to His children.

**Third**, in reading through all of this literature I am in agreement with Mark Jones regarding many subtle similarities between PA in our day and the full-blown antinomianism of the seventeenth century. Jones draws out five concerns that Puritan theologian Anthony Burgess (1600–1664) expressed in the antinomian controversy of his day.<sup>77</sup> And I believe that these same concerns ought to resonate with us as we interact with the various books, blogposts, and podcasts we see coming from PA today.

- We must be careful not to exalt preaching about grace that overshadows the centrality of Christ. “There is today a great deal of talk about ‘grace.’ It is described as scandalous, liberating, shocking, counterintuitive, unpredictable, dangerous, etc. But when an emphasis on grace eclipses a focus on Christ . . . then grace is not being preached” (p 114).
- Oftentimes Antinomians reject the accusation of Antinomianism in their writings, but in the end they are “loath to speak about the moral law in a positive sense” (p 115) and actually end up supporting antinomian ideas as they proceed.<sup>78</sup> Jones uses Tullian’s exegesis of Philippians 2:12–13 in *Jesus + Nothing*, 96, to illustrate this point: “Think of what Paul tells us in Philippians 2:12: ‘Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.’ We’ve got work to do—but what exactly is it? Get better? Try harder? Pray more? Get more involved in church? Read the Bible longer? What *precisely* is Paul exhorting us to do? He goes on to explain: ‘For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure’ (v. 13). God works *his* work in *you*, which is the work already accomplished by Christ. Our hard work, therefore, means coming to a greater understanding of his work.” Jones comments (p 116), “How does this fit with Paul’s exhortation to work out our salvation with fear and trembling? Paul surely did not reduce Christian living to contemplating Christ.”
- There is a tendency for Antinomians to preach texts where Christ and his grace are spoken of, but then avoid those texts where duties are commanded and God’s Law commended. The antidote for this tendency is why we commend expositional preaching at our seminaries: preach the whole counsel of God! Jones insightfully notes, “Frequently, antinomians are in more serious error in what they fail to say than in what they do say” (p 117).
- Antinomianism tends to speak as though they have discovered some grand new truth, some “better” way. “The rhetoric one often hears today has to do with ‘getting it.’ That someone ‘gets grace’ often really means that ‘it does not matter what we do’.

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<sup>77</sup>Jones, *Antinomianism*, 114–18. Jones gives the following bibliographical information for Burgess’s book: Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae legis: or, A vindication of the morall law and the covenants, from the Errors of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and more especially Antinomians* (London: T. Underhill, 1646).

<sup>78</sup>One example is Gerhard Forde, who is critiqued well by Jack Kilcrease, “Gerhard Forde’s Doctrine of Law,” 164–69.

Condescending talk abounds from the lips of modern-day antinomians who think they alone have understood what grace is” (p 117).

- The Antinomian tends to become very repetitious in his sermons, preaching grace and gospel, all the while thinking that the same point must be made in every sermon. Do you have problems in your marriage? Believe the Gospel. Do you struggle with pornography? Believe the Gospel. Do you have a worrying problem? Believe the Gospel. Jones (p 118), “One of the dangers of antinomian preaching: it becomes boring. The same repetitive mantras are preached week after week, to the point that if you have heard one sermon, you have heard them all. . . . Christ should be in every sermon, as we see in apostolic example and teaching. Preaching the whole Christ prevents us from becoming monotonous in our so-called gospel summaries at the end of every sermon.”

Again, in this paper I do not intend to speak of Protestant Antinomians as heretics, but instead to spotlight that misdirected interpretations of various biblical texts have caused an imbalance in understanding sanctification rightly. May God help us to be biblical in our preaching and teaching, not reading our theology back into the Bible but letting each passage say what it is saying so that we can direct our hearers to look to Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith (Heb 12:2).