

## Who Is the Antinomian?

The word *antinomian* means *against the law* (*anti + nomos*). The term is often used derogatorily of believers who hold to a dispensational and Free Grace understanding of Scripture. The controversy centers on the meaning of *law*, its relationship to the Christian life, the relationship of justification to sanctification, and the basis of assurance.

### The accusation

Critics charge that the Free Grace view of justification by grace alone through faith alone separates justification from sanctification making holiness optional and assurance of salvation detached from a transformed life. It allows for carnal professing believers who are not really saved and encourages licentiousness. Accusers believe justification places the Christian under the rule of law and cannot be separated from sanctification, which is the basis of assurance. Ironically, many who make this accusation acknowledge that Free Grace teachers themselves generally live godly lives and encourage holiness in others.

### Is the Law for Christians today?

A key issue is whether the Mosaic Law remains binding on Christians. Critics usually divide the Law into moral, ceremonial, and civil categories, claiming only the moral law continues. However, Scripture consistently treats the Law as a unified whole (Gal. 3:10; 5:3; Jas. 2:10). The Mosaic Law was given to Israel (Rom. 5:9:4; John 15:25; 18:31), not to everyone (Rom. 2:14). Some claim Ephesians 6:1-4 is an example of Moses' Law ruling today, but the context of 5:18 – 6:9 is about the outworking of the Holy Spirit in various relationships. Besides, no land is promised to non-Jews. If Christians remain under the Mosaic moral law, consistency would require accepting its penalties as well, such as death (Matt. 15:3-4; John 8:3-5). Furthermore, many New Testament references to "law" do not refer to Moses' Law (as in Matt. 22:36-40; Rom. 7:7-14) but to God's will more broadly (Rom. 2:14; 7:22; 1 Jn 3:4; Jas 1:25). (For a fuller discussion see *GraceNotes* no. 84 "The Christian and the Law")

### A defense against the charge of antinomianism

1. *Justification and sanctification are distinct.* Justification is the basis for sanctification, but the two must not be confused or the gospel is perverted by works. No one can be sanctified without first being justified (Rom. 5:9–11). While justified believers should grow spiritually, the degree of sanctification varies and cannot serve as an infallible test of salvation.
2. *Christ fulfilled the Mosaic Law.* Jesus fully met the requirements of the Law (Matt. 5:17). Believers now live under the Law of Christ in this dispensation of grace (John 1:17; Gal. 6:2). The Mosaic Law accomplished its purpose by revealing sin and leading people to Christ (Gal. 3:24). Though its moral principles remain instructive, the Mosaic Law itself is no longer the believer's rule of life.
3. *The believer's rule of life is the Law of Christ.* Believers are not under the Mosaic Law but are dead to its governing authority (Rom. 7:10). They recognize the Law accomplished its intended purposes (Rom 3:31; 7:12). Through the Holy Spirit they follow the Law of Christ summarized by love which encompasses and fulfills the moral principles of Moses' Law (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14). As believers walk in the Spirit, they

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naturally fulfill the righteous principles embodied in the Law (Gal. 5:22-23). The Apostle Paul argues that since works of the Law are ineffective for justification (Gal. 2:16) believers should not return to them for sanctification (Gal. 3:1). Believers are sanctified by “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2).

4. *The Apostle Paul distinguished the Law of Moses from the Law of Christ.* He did not consider himself under the Mosaic Law, but “under the law toward Christ” (1 Cor. 9:19-21) summarized in Jesus’ command, to love one another (John 13:34).
5. *Believers today are under grace, not law.* Paul says it clearly: “you are not under law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14). Grace is received through faith and cannot be mixed with any law (Rom. 4:4-5, 14; 5:2; 11:6). Under grace, sanctification comes through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, not through adherence to the Mosaic code (Rom. 7:6; 8:2-4; Gal. 5:5-6, 16, 22-25).
6. *Obedience is a grateful response.* Believers obey New Testament commands (laws) not to be saved, stay saved, or prove they are saved, but to express gratitude to God and their desire to please Him. A predetermined or guaranteed response would be meaningless. Some believers may abuse the freedom that grace brings leading to the reality of carnal Christians (1 Cor. 3:1-5).
7. *Grace motivates Godly living.* Grace does not encourage sin. Paul roundly rejected that charge in Romans 6. Grace teaches believers to live godly lives (Titus 2:11-12), while the coming Judgment Seat of Christ provides a powerful incentive for faithful living (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10).
8. *Those under law must keep all of it.* Scripture teaches that those who place themselves under the law are obligated to keep all of it (Gal. 3:10; 5:3; Jas. 2:10). Since that is impossible, reliance on the law results in the curse of bondage and estrangement from Christ (Gal. 3:10; 4:21-5:4).

### Who is the real antinomian?

Some forms of Reformed theology teach that saving faith includes the obedience that inevitably produces perseverance and good works. If sanctification is guaranteed by justification, one might ask what practical role law serves in the Christian life. In Reformed Covenant theology, obedience becomes an assumed outcome rather than a meaningful choice, which seemingly argues against intentional law-keeping. That system can also create uncertainty when assurance is tied primarily to works rather than to Christ’s promise.

### Conclusion

The charge of antinomianism misunderstands the Free Grace position. Free Grace theology does not reject God’s authority, holiness, or the call to obedience. It rejects the Mosaic Law as the Christian’s rule of life and affirms that believers live under the Law of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Grace is indeed risky because freedom can be abused. Yet the New Testament presents grace—not law—as God’s means of producing spiritual growth. The possibility of abuse does not invalidate grace any more than the possibility of hypocrisy invalidates obedience. The believer’s motivation is not fear of losing salvation nor the need to prove salvation, but gratitude for God’s unconditional gift and the desire to please the One who gave it.

