

another gospel



The New Antinomians and their “Gospel-Driven” Doctrine

Descriptive Essays by Paul M. Dohse Sr.

“It is thoroughly Scriptural and right to say ‘faith alone justifies.’ But it is not equally Scriptural and right to say ‘faith alone sanctifies.’”

~ J.C. Ryle

“Quietism will ruin people’s lives”

~ Dr. Jay E. Adams

“In some respects an opposite error to Popery, ...the Antinomians ... make all sanctification to be justification ...”

~ James Durham

“There is only one heresy, and that is Antinomianism.”

~ Scottish pastor John “Rabbi” Duncan

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Section Two

The Gospel According to Francis Chan

*.....Its gotta be
More like falling in love
Than something to believe in
More like losing my heart
Than giving my allegiance
Caught up, called out
Come take a look at me now
Its like I'm falling
Its like I'm falling in love*

*Love, Love
Deeper and deeper
It was love that made me a believer
In more than a name, a faith, a creed
Falling in love with Jesus brought the
change in me*

*Its gotta be
More like falling in love
Than something to believe in
More like losing my heart
Than giving my allegiance
Caught up, called out
Come take a look at me now
Its like I'm falling, Ohhhh
Its like I'm falling in love*

Francis Chan's “Crazy Love” is Really Antinomian Puppy-Love

Before I comment on “Crazy Love” by Francis Chan (2008), let me set the table. There is a *let go and let God* theology sweeping through Christianity which is sometimes referred to as *gospel sanctification*. Hereafter, I will refer to it as “GS.” Let go and let God theology, for all practical purposes, is antinomianism because it either advocates an inability to uphold the law by Christians or the view that Christians are not obligated to uphold it in God's eyes. Either way, use of the law in the life of a Christian is denied.

Basically, GS teaches that we are sanctified in the exact same way that we are justified, by faith and repentance alone. Therefore, if the law (by this term “law” I mean the Scriptures in general and imperatives in particular) can't save us, neither can it be used or recognized in sanctification either. They use Galatians 3:2,3 as a proof text for this position.

Secondly, it teaches that Christ came to not only die for our sins, but to fulfill the law by obeying it perfectly with His life. In essence, it teaches that Christ obeyed the law for us, and His perfect obedience and fulfillment of the law is imputed to us in the same way righteousness is imputed to us in salvation by faith alone. Therefore, we are not obligated to the law. This is sometimes referred to as the *imputed active obedience of Christ*.

Thirdly, It teaches that Christ not only fulfilled the law, but replaced it with a new law that only has one command: love God and others. Furthermore, in only being obligated by this one law, our proper fulfillment of this one law is judged by our intentions and conscience, not necessarily biblical imperatives. They use Matthew 22: 36-40 as a proof text for this position.

Fourthly, according to advocates, acts of true love will always be accompanied by a willing spirit and joy. Nothing should ever be done out of mere duty. The old Christian adage, “Obey God whether you feel like it or not” is considered to be anathema. Acts of true love are often described as a “mere natural flow.”

Fifthly, GS propagates the idea that Christians are still spiritually dead, and the only life in us is Christ working through the Holy Spirit. That's why true love can always be expected to be a mere natural flow,

because it is really Christ doing the work through us. They use Galatians 2:20 as a proof text for this position. This text is also used to advocate sanctification by faith alone.

Sixthly, sanctification is only accomplished through faith and deep introspection for purposes of repentance, which empties our soul of sin, and results in Christ living through us.

Seventh, the Bible's sole purpose is to aid us in faith and repentance. As we see “pictures of Jesus” in the Bible, we learn more about who He is, and see Him more clearly. Our faith is then increased and we are changed from “glory to glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18 is the proof text for that). The Bible also aids us in looking deep within our souls to see sin that we need to repent of. In addition, all of the vast imperatives we see in the Bible makes us more thankful for Christ, knowing that we could never uphold all of those commands and He has done it for us. Thank goodness they (commands) have all been abrogated by the love of Christ working through us, according to them, that is.

Eighth, since the primary goal is to know more of who Christ is (as opposed to learning what He has said for the purpose of applying it to our lives), which increases our faith and love for Him, we don't necessarily limit that knowledge to Scripture. General revelation is seen as being almost as valuable, because the idea is to get to know Christ as a person, “not a cognitive concept that we apply to life” (Paul David Tripp). This is eerily similar to postmodern thinking.

Obviously, I wouldn't have gone through all of the trouble to explain the above if I didn't think “Crazy Love” (hereafter “CL”) propagated gospel sanctification. Per the usual, advocates of GS partake in careful wordcraft; it goes without saying that my aforesaid description would be rejected out of hand by most evangelicals. Though there are hints of GS in the first half of the book, the doctrine is not prevalent until page 101, that's when elements of the doctrine start becoming obvious.

Somewhat unique in CL is the heavy dose of *Jesus is my boyfriend theology*. Chan pours this on really thick, even by John Piper's standard, who is also an advocate of GS. Piper, who likens true saving faith to a deep, romantic-like love for Christ, is quoted at least once in CL. Let's face it, if we can't love our Lord by obeying “everything I have commanded” (as in most GS based books, the Lordship of Christ is conspicuously missing), then something else has to fill the gap; such as, a “sincere,” syrupy-like romantic love similar to teenage puppy-love. In fact, according to Chan, regarding the account of his grandmother's relationship with Christ: He was her “lover” (p. 100).

Throughout the book, Chan draws conclusions about how we should experience our relationship with Christ from horizontal relationships; namely, romantic ones. Hence, “Because when you're wildly in love with someone, it changes everything.” This is indicative of the eighth element, which puts general revelation on the same par with specific revelation (the Bible). There is a very heavy dose of this in the beginning of the book as Chan emphasizes the study of creation in order to understand Christ as a “person.” Chan also uses the GS phrase “word pictures” to describe the Bible throughout CL. On pages 34 and 35, Chan categorizes general revelation and the Bible together as two ways of knowing God as set against what we can't know about Him: “So far we have talked about things we can see with our own eyes, things we know about creation, and some of the attributes of God as revealed in the Bible. But many facets of God expand beyond our comprehension.”

Besides an overemphasis on general revelation as a matching bookend with specific revelation, there is only a hint of the GS doctrine in the first 100 pages. The first thing I began to notice was the devaluing of practical application and obedience, which are both antithetical to GS doctrine. In regard to our supposed paramount goal of knowing Christ as a person rather than what he expects of us (number eight), Chan says the following on page 30: “If the ‘gravest question’ before us really is what God Himself is like, how do we learn to know Him?” Is the “gravest” question before Christians that of who God is? Or, is what God wants us to do of equal importance? I think we know the answer to that, and a balanced perspective by Chan is conspicuously missing throughout the book.

Then on page 101, Chan takes a hard left turn and launches into full-blown GS doctrine. After denying throughout the book (in nuanced fashion) that we are slaves obligated to obey Christ (because that doesn't fit the gushy **Jesus as boyfriend** prism), and that God would use fear, guilt, or reward to motivate us, he says that Galatians 5:13-14 teaches the following: “When we love, we're free! We don't have to worry about a burdensome load of commands, because when we are loving, we can't sin. Do you feel free in your Christian life?”(p.102).

Just please stop and think about what he is saying. Words mean things. He is clearly saying that when we love we are free from the law; in fact, we don't have to worry about... “commands.” In other words, love is measured by some other standard than biblical imperatives, presumably, good feelings. Do you think that is unfair of me to say? Well then, look at how he wants you to determine if you are loving or not:

“Do you feel free in your Christian life?” And: “When we work for Christ out of obligation, it feels like work. But when we truly love Christ, our work is a manifestation of that love, and it feels like love” (page 110). Is that true? Does obedience to Christ always “feel [s] like love”?

The whole line of thought here clearly falls under element number three of GS doctrine. Furthermore, let's be good Bereans and take a look at Galatians 5:13-14, the biblical text Chan cites to make his point:

“You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'”

Paul is talking about our freedom from the law in regard to being saved, and then using it as an excuse to live any way we want to: “Hey, I'm saved anyway, and the law can't get me into heaven, so why not live any way I want to?” Because it's self-focused and the antithesis of love, that's why. But Paul is not saying that love has no standard other than itself because it replaced the law. That is a classic antinomian misrepresentation of that passage. In the same statement, Chan even comforts his readers by assuring them that they are not sinning by loving apart from biblical imperatives/guidelines: “....because when we are loving, we can't sin” [that's why we supposedly don't need to worry about “burdensome commands,” and this is also indicative of the abrogation of the law which is supposedly replaced by the single *higher law of love*].

Chan reiterates his point by quoting the apostle Paul in verse 6 of the same chapter: “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” This doesn't mean, as Chan implies, that love interprets itself because it comes from an undefined realization of who Christ is via a personal, nebulous, and supposedly intimate relationship. Do you think that is unfair as well? Here is what Chan says on page 104: “Something mysterious, even supernatural must happen in order for genuine love for God to grow in our hearts. The Holy Spirit has to move in our lives. It is a remarkable cycle: Our prayers for more love result in love, which naturally causes us to pray more, which results in more love....” The “cycle” that Chan describes here is nowhere to be found in the Scriptures, but rather, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” Or, “Peter, do you love me? [then] feed my sheep.” At the very least, Chan is propagating a love that always comes naturally through a cycle of prayer only. In the best case that can be surmised, he is clearly in serious error.

Also, Chan forgets to mention that the apostle Paul also said: “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts” (1Corinthians 7:19). About a year ago, I counseled a fellow who was having trouble with a church leadership that propagates the GS doctrine. He was utterly perplexed as to why they completely ignored clear biblical directives regarding his situation. The answer is simple: if their motive was love, they did not deem themselves as obligated to biblical imperatives. Throughout the rest of the book, Chan seems to make strong statements regarding the need to obey, but what he is talking about is obedience to the one single law of love, not biblical imperatives. This is the type of double-speaking deception that I have come to expect from propagators of the GS doctrine.

Throughout the rest of the book after page 101, Chan draws a tight GS line that propagates spiritual growth by a narrow, passive concept of meditation and prayer only (pp. 104, 148, 170, to cite a few), and acts of love always experienced as a mere natural flow accompanied by joy (pp. 110, 120, 129, to name a few). It is fair to say that the second half of the book is saturated with GS doctrine in its usual nuanced form. But page 203 is worth mentioning before I close. Chan presents Galatians 3:3 as a Pauline contention against effort in the sanctification process which is also supposedly a false gospel. This is a typical GS stance. Concerning this passage, Chan says the following:

“I think each of us has a strong tendency to attempt to wrestle control from the Spirit and ‘do’ this life on our own. Each of us tends to switch from living the gospel of grace to trusting in a system of works. That's why Paul brings up this issue with the churches in Galatia.”

So, effort on our part (Christians) to “do’ this life” is supposedly denying the gospel that originally saved us. “On our own” is added as a red herring, no one asserts that the Christian life is apart from the Spirit. This is the most basic element of GS which is the synthesizing of justification and sanctification. Obviously, if we can't do anything to be saved, neither can we participate in sanctification either except for the same role we play in justification: faith and repentance only.

However, Paul was not talking about sanctification in Galatians 3:3. He was talking about the Galatians possibly denying the gospel that saved them by faith alone, and doing so by returning to a salvation by works. Apparently, they were being tempted to consummate this decision by being circumcised, and therefore denying the true gospel by proclaiming a false one. This is absolutely clear by the way Paul summarizes his argument:

“Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace” (Galatians 5:2-4).

Paul makes it clear that he was talking about justification (“You who are trying to be **justified** by law”) and not sanctification. Besides, specifically, Paul is talking about their ultimate goal of being completely transformed (glorification) in 3:3, not sanctification, or their role in the growing process. Paul discusses that in the second part of the book, the first part deals with justification. This can be clearly seen by the fact that Paul uses the word “justification” at least ten times in the book while “sanctification” is not used once, even though it is a biblical word in the same way justification is (1 Corinthians 1:30 and 6:11; both are listed together with glorification).

It is no different than someone who is saved by the true gospel, but then leaves a doctrinally sound community of believers for a community that professes a false gospel. Like Paul, we would “stand in doubt” of them. Besides, specifically, Paul is talking about their ultimate goal of being completely transformed (glorification) in 3:3, not sanctification, or their role in the growing process. I believe the Young's Literal Translation demonstrates this well:

“so thoughtless are ye! having begun in the Spirit, now in the flesh do ye end?”

In the final analysis, CL adorns GS with some challenges that the church needs to hear, but Chan's solution is a false doctrine. The first hundred passages were subtle enough to keep me in denial while eating red herrings and ignoring straw men used to diss the conventional hearing of God's word and the proper application to life thereof.

And all in all, antinomianism was the big problem at Galatia, not so-called “legalism.” The fault Paul attacked dumbs down the law by replacing it with the traditions of men while propagating salvation via a ritual; viz, circumcision or baptism. You then keep your salvation by some simplistic formula that replaces a literal application of God's word. Paul said, NO! If you want to be justified by the “law” (in context an idiom for the true law interpreted by tradition) you are obligated to keep the whole law truthfully.

True love fulfills the law apart from being judged by it for justification.