

Modern Antinomianism

Introduction

This is not a study of all the forms of antinomianism that are out there; that would require several books since antinomianism is now very common. This is going to examine one popular example of antinomianism exemplified by one source and I will analyse the theology of it because it is a serious matter.

The source is Terry Virgo, leader of a global church movement (New Frontiers) comprising many thousands of people. Terry calls himself an 'apostle' but is really an archbishop ruling over multiple churches (until his retirement), the vast majority (if not all) that he did not actually plant himself.¹

Full disclosure: I was once a friend and colleague of Terry. I joined my Brighton house church to his Hove Clarendon Church (which was then actually led by Baptist Henry Tyler) in 1979-80. I was one of seven leaders present in his backroom as the original Coastlands ministry began to form, later NFI, then New Frontiers. I served the church faithfully as it grew but became more and more concerned as we moved from the original vision of a '*church in every street*' (Henry's vision) to a centralised, large, triumphalist vehicle to '*authenticate*' Terry's ministry (his words).

Also Terry's ministry became more and more unorthodox as he took on board every new fad that he picked up from his many international 'apostolic' travels. These started to mix occult Pentecostal ideas with our original vibrant Calvinism. When he closed the successful local, autonomous congregations (ours grew 350% in 18 months in Brighton Art College) to form one huge meeting in the Odeon cinema, my time was done. I resigned leadership and strongly contested the many problems that he was foisting on the church to his face. I had to leave the church within a year - after ten years of sacrificial service - for which I was shunned, slandered, and smeared (not directly by Terry but by his followers).² Many so-called close 'friends' deserted my family and myself and even crossed the street to avoid us. This hypocrisy and abuse had a very damaging effect on my wife and children, which lasted years. Sadly this feature was common in his church circles and Clarendon church lost 110 excellent people (many were leaders of some sort) in just over a year after this centralisation.³

Looking back I see many clear foundational problems. I understood most of these at the time and wrote them up in a dossier, which few have seen. Today I am even clearer.

Terry was not a pastor but rather an evangelist and churches cannot be led by an evangelist. Pastors draw people together, evangelists send people out. Evangelists do not understand how to equip and nurture a congregation. Terry did not pastor the church but delegated that to others, often people poorly qualified but very loyal. The evangelistic fads

¹ Thus denying the essential character of being an apostle.

² For example, it was propagated that I was dismissed from the church for serious heresy when in fact I left the church voluntarily for its heresy.

³ In true Machiavellian political strategy, this centralisation was publicised as decentralisation since the five Sunday congregations were replaced by several smaller meetings, but these only met once a month, mid-week and all failed.

that Terry charged the church to follow continually cut across local pastoral initiatives causing serious frustration in the people, especially older mature people. If the church did not have a local following of students (in a town with a high population of them), who came for the exciting rock music entertainment that feigned to be worship, the church would probably have died long ago. There are many other matters, which I will not discuss.

The real teaching issue was that Terry has a very poor grasp of theology, despite being a claimed source of wisdom and divine authority due to this apostolic status (obviously this is wrong). Terry was at the mercy of whatever book he read last (even if it was heretical) as well as foreign ideas and teachings picked up from other apostles and prophets. For instance, after a visit to Korea he brought back (either intentionally or accidentally) shouted corporate prayer – everyone shouting a loud prayer on top of everyone else causing a massive din. This originated with the heretical Shouters, one part of which was operative in Korea.

Terry originally became somewhat famous for bringing expositions of Romans 6 and explaining it in a somewhat Higher Life theological manner. At the time he was very influenced by Martyn Lloyd-Jones (who was himself confused about Romans 6 and sanctification) and his teaching was more restrained and Biblical, if not fully correct. Later he read other doubtful books, which steered him in the direction of full-blown antinomianism. What started in the 80s as getting dominion over sin by understanding the fulness of Christ's work, became the idea that Christians are never guilty. This is antinomian.

Terry is famous for preaching grace but his teaching leads not to grace but to licentiousness. In fact, one can see this being worked out in members of his churches on a frighteningly frequent regularity, many of whom I have observed feeling free to live disorderly without qualms.⁴

The antinomianism of Terry Virgo

In Christ God holds us guilty for absolutely nothing. Some people can't accept forgiveness, setting themselves above God.⁵

For a full discussion of guilt or not see my paper 'Are Christians ever guilty before God?'

Terry's sermons make clear that 'In Christ' here means being a Christian in general; indeed his sermons amplify his antinomianism to ridiculous ends. He once said that a Christian could kick an old lady across the street and would still not be guilty before God because Christ has freed us from sin and guilt.⁶ I've got news for him; anyone who did such a thing IS guilty before God and if they do not repent and confess their sin they will go to hell, whatever church they go to. However, it is preposterous to even suggest that a genuine Christian could do such a thing. The Gospel message involves divine power to change people and follow Christ (Rm 1:16). Someone committing gross public sin has not been

⁴ Just a few examples, I have seen a youth leader boast about cheating the taxman. I have seen church leaders seriously psychologically abuse women (some required medical attention afterwards). I have seen senior pastors neglect their wives (and I have admonished them). I have seen leaders feel free to swear. Terry has also supported and sponsored leaders who were alcoholics (Paul Cain), who committed violence (Todd Bentley), who committed sexual abuse (Bob Jones) or that have engaged in occult behaviour (many leaders inc. John Wimber). Male leaders on his platform have covered their heads with impunity.

⁵ Terry Virgo, Twitter, 6.9.11.

⁶ Spoken in Clarendon Church in the 1980s and also in his Bible Weeks.

changed by the Holy Spirit. I do not understand how a true believer could teach such an illustration to represent grace.

We need to unpack this idea that Christians can never be guilty because God has forgiven them in Christ.

What can it mean theologically?

Universalism?

There are many forms of this but several teach that all people will go to heaven because Christ's redemption secured forgiveness for everyone without distinction and there is no hell. This means that whatever sins a man commits, in the end there is no guilt for him since Christ's atonement paid for all sins.

Some universalists are hardly even Christian in any sense of the word. Those that claim to be Christian base their universalism on verses like:

God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved. 1 Tim 2:3-4

The living God, who is *the* Saviour of all men. 1 Tim 4:10

The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. Titus 2:11

This argument is simply based on deliberate ignorance of the huge numbers of verses that teach that only a few are saved and the wicked will go to hell. Such as:

Many are called, but few chosen. Matt 20:16

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. Jn 3:36

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Rm 1:18

Not all have faith. 2 Thess 3:2

Chiefly, universalists ignore the fact that only the elect are saved and these are chosen unconditionally in eternity and not through any works they perform. Argue as they might that this is a hated Calvinistic doctrine, it runs through the Bible like a seam of coal in a mountain. Election is the foundation of grace and grace is the basis of salvation.

Doctrinal context demands that the apparent universalistic texts are properly interpreted according to the writer's intention. The pastoral letters quoted above were written to Christian pastors very familiar with Paul's doctrinal position. They are not statements to the general public about a universalistic salvation but affirmations to workers that God saves all sorts of people in the elect. This was to encourage evangelists like Timothy and Titus to witness to enemies of the church and persecutors of believers, chiefly rulers of various sorts. We must never rule anyone out of grace.

So universalists affirm that all people are not guilty in the end because Christ's redemption has secured their salvation.

Terry does not believe this; he is not a full universalist.

Perfectionism?

The next possible theological meaning is perfectionism.

This is the doctrine, commonly found amongst Wesleyans and Holiness Movement people, that after a certain crisis experience (usually called the baptism in the Spirit, after John Fletcher of Madeley), one experiences perfect love followed by instant sanctification. Thus Wesleyans often claimed to have not sinned for 'x' number of years (I have met such folk).

This doctrine of sinless perfection is a type of Perfectionism that is utterly unbiblical (note 1 Jn 1:8). It is based on the idea that God provided such grace in the Gospel that Christians can be fully perfected and holy if they had a big experience of it. In fact it is a delusion and the people claiming it show that in fact they are merely downplaying and excusing sin. The genuine believer is always aware that he is a sinner saved by the blood of Christ, he is the chief of sinners. A true Christian would never say that he is holy; the very claim is proof of sin.

Now I do not believe that Terry holds this view, though he has been influenced by Wesleyans. At least, he did not propound this doctrine when I knew him in the 1980s.

Antinomianism

The next possibility is antinomianism.

To suggest that '*God holds us guilty for absolutely nothing*' means that elect (thus not universalism) sinners do sin (thus not radical Perfectionism) but that this sin is covered by the blood of Christ and there is automatic forgiveness by that atonement. This is a failure to understand several doctrines at once. It is a theologically ignorant idea.

Antinomianism means 'against law' (*anti* [against] *nomos* [law]) and was a term coined by Martin Luther against the Reformation Antinomians.⁷ It teaches that because believers are '*dead to the law*', or '*not under law but under grace*' the moral law is not binding upon Christians. Thus a Christian can sin with impunity because the grace of God superabounds over sin. This, I believe, is Terry's view and it is classic antinomianism. It is something that he has derived from Higher Life and Holiness Movement teachings.⁸

Summary of attempted justifications for antinomianism

1. Justification means that you no longer have an obligation to obey the moral law. I.e. since justification has cleansed us from all sins and made us legally righteous in heaven, we are not under law but under grace. Mistake: this ignores the difference between the believer's heavenly standing and his earthly condition. It misunderstands the phases of sanctification. It ignores clear Biblical commands to New Covenant believers.
2. Christ has raised Christians above the law so they no longer have to keep it, as the Spirit will keep them from sin. Mistake: no one is above the law. Even Christ on Earth was under the law and obeyed it perfectly. The Spirit guides us and we do not sin if we walk in the Spirit, but if we ignore him or grieve him we immediately sin, and no one is perfectly full of the Spirit all the time.

⁷ Chiefly Johann Agricola.

⁸ The Holiness Movement was a chiefly US perfectionist and Wesleyan movement that partly spawned the more British Higher Life Movement based on Keswick conferences.

3. Some Gnostic-inspired people taught that the law came from the Demiurge not God, so the Christian should disobey it. Mistake: this is a false pagan concept that has no Biblical validity.
4. Sin is inevitable so there is no point resisting it. Mistake: this ignores God's commands to resist the devil and flee from sin plus the many commands to obey righteousness. It also ignores the fact that we are under the Law of Christ.
5. The Gospel got rid of law. Law is contrary to the Gospel and therefore it is to be ignored. Mistake: the Gospel is the fulfilment of the law and Jesus said that the smallest points of the law would never be destroyed.⁹ Jesus and the apostles demand that we obey moral laws. The New Covenant is not without laws.
6. Believers are dead to the law and not under it. Mistake: believers are in-law in Christ and are never without moral law. They obey the Law of Christ and follow the commandments Christ gave. Believers are only dead to the Mosaic Law in the new man but not in the old man.¹⁰
7. Modern philosophies work against law; such as situation ethics, moral relativism and existentialism. Mistake: these are human ideologies that have no authority. God's word is our authority and this demands obedience to moral law.

Terry's position is a combination of points 1, 2, 5, and 6. His statement that Christians are never guilty is something that only God can affirm, and is thus blasphemous.

Confusingly, Terry has, on occasion, preached that sins must be dealt with and confessed. Despite this he frequently propounds the view that Christians cannot be guilty for sin. This contradiction is typical of Terry's lack of theological understanding. In fact, his admission that he himself still sins contradicts his message of no guilt. If he has said that he sins and has said that sins must be confessed, then there is guilt to be removed by confession.

The mistakes

Failing to understand what moral law is

Some erroneous Calvinists claim that the moral law is not binding upon Christians and this protects 'free grace',¹¹ confusing the law as a covenant (i.e. Mosaic Law; the Old Covenant) and the law as a moral commandment. While I believe that some claimed Calvinistic Antinomians were misunderstood, and while I also believe that many Reformed have misunderstood the New Covenant and live under a reformed Old Covenant, the idea is still antinomian.

The chief mistake is failing to understand God's law and its expressions.

The moral law

The moral law is the perpetual will of God for human behaviour and this was expressed in the patriarchs before Moses, following the oral teaching of God to Adam. All the expressions of moral law in the Mosaic Law are found in the patriarchs if you look closely enough.

⁹ Matt 5:17-18, 'Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled'. ['Jot' or *Iota*, the smallest letter of the Greek alphabet, used metaphorically or proverbially for the smallest thing (Matt 5:18) or it may be = *yod*, which is the smallest of the Hebrew letters. 'Tittle', a point, (Matt 5:18; Lk 16:17) the minute point or stroke added to some letters of the Hebrew alphabet to distinguish them from others which they resemble; hence, the very least point.]

¹⁰ The Mosaic Law is over the old man, the Adamic nature.

¹¹ Actually this is a tautology all grace is free. 'Sovereign grace' is a better term.

The Mosaic Law

The Mosaic Law is the covenant with Moses regarding the expression of the Old Covenant. This was binding upon Israel for a temporary period (Gal 3:19) and was the necessary preparation for the message that the Messiah would bring (Gal 3:24). The Mosaic Law enshrined all the precepts of the moral law within its statutes in writing, especially in the Ten Commandments, and in this sense it also has an application to all sinners. The Mosaic Law thus codified in statute what the moral law is; which is summed up in: 'love God with all your being and love your neighbour as yourself'.

This covenant was done away with by the redemption and ascension of Christ (Heb 8:13). This is particularly explained in the books of Hebrews and Galatians. The Christian is not under this law (Mosaic Law) but is in Christ. The Christian is not righteous by legalistically obeying the statutes of Moses (which gives no power but magnifies sin) but by being in Christ whereby the Spirit gives him power in the new nature to live right.

However, being in Christ involves being under the Law of Christ (Gal 6:2). No one is in Christ unless he obeys Christ's commandments (1 Jn 2:3-4). Now these commands are the moral law plus some others (such as loving your enemies). The moral law that was subsumed in the Mosaic Law (Old Covenant) is now subsumed in the New Covenant. Again one can identify these moral laws by studying what the Gospel teaches (do not steal, do not commit adultery, do not kill etc.). The idea that we are not under these moral laws is preposterous.

For a full explanation of the Christian and the law see my paper, 'The believer's relationship to the law'.

Terry fails to understand that Christians are under law, but the not the Law of Moses.

Failing to see that Christians can be condemned and guilty

There are many NT texts stating that Christians are, or can be, guilty. To be guilty is to be condemned for sin.

- Peter stood condemned when Paul confronted him.¹² 'Blamed' here is the Greek word *kataginosko*, meaning: 'condemn', 'detecting evil in oneself', 'judged to be guilty'.
- Christians who doubt, who fail to live by faith, are guilty.¹³
- Christians who manifest pride are guilty.¹⁴
- Christians who cast off faith by acting wrongly are guilty.¹⁵
- If you transgress even one point of the law you are guilty.¹⁶
- Even apostles made mistakes and were thus guilty.¹⁷

¹² Gal 2:11-13, 'Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.'

¹³ Rm 14:23, 'But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *he does not eat* from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin'.

¹⁴ 1 Tim 3:6, 'Not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil'.

¹⁵ 1 Tim 5:11-12, 'But refuse *the* younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith.'

¹⁶ Jm 2:10-12, 'For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty.'

- If you grumble you are guilty.¹⁸
- Public lying results in guilt (Acts 5:3-5, 8-10).
- Sexual immorality results in guilt (1 Cor 5:1-5).
- Failing to honour the body in the Lord's Supper results in serious guilt (1 Cor 11:27-32).

Far from there never being any guilt for Christians, as Terry teaches, there are many passages (even more than above) that categorically state that Christians, including real apostles, can be guilty. It is simply unbiblical and foolish to affirm otherwise.

Failing to see that grace puts believers in-law to Christ

Christians are never without law; ever!

To those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law. 1 Cor 9:21

The Greek for 'under law to Christ' (*ennomos Christo*) is really 'in law to Christ'. Believers are never without law, they are in law to Christ. By being in Christ they obey God's law, which is actually the law of Christ. Neither does this law condemn them as they remain in Christ (abide in Christ, put on the new man).

When you walk in the Spirit you obey the law of Christ, but being spiritual does not remove law.

The liberty of a Christian man is not liberty from obedience to the law but from disobedience to it.

Thomas Taylor (Puritan).

Failing to observe the many commands to New Covenant believers to obey laws

Redeemed people are always under the moral law of God and always have been.

When Israel was placed under law it was as a redeemed people (Exod 20:1-3), a people brought out and paid for by blood sacrifice.

Paul, despite being justified by faith and having the imputed righteousness of Christ could say that he delighted in the law of God (Rm 7:22). He also explained that grace increases a believer's obligation to law (Rm 3:31).

Christ commanded his people, those who abide in him, to obey his commandments (Jn 15:10).

Paul, speaking to people under grace, repeatedly demanded that they obey laws (E.g. 1 Cor 7:19, 14:37; 1 Thess 4:2).

The covenant of grace involves the very moral law of God being placed into convert's hearts (Heb 8:8, 10).

¹⁷ Jm 3:1-2, 'My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.'

¹⁸ Jm 5:9, 'Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!'

Terry fails to understand that the people of God, of any dispensation, are always under God's law. No man is ever without responsibility to the law of God.

Failing to understand the conflict between the old and new natures

If you do not understand the concept of the old and new nature you cannot progress in grace, can never have victory and can never please God. It is fundamental to living by faith and having dominion over sin.

The fact of the old and new nature is made plain in many places (e.g. Rm 6:4-6; 2 Cor 5:17; Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9). Because of our old nature, sin easily besets us (Heb 12:1). In fact, our old nature is never extinguished in this life, merely made unemployed by faith and choice; thus it grows in corruption (Eph 4:22; 'corrupt' here means defiled, corrupt, depraved). The idea that the old man is annihilated at regeneration is utter nonsense.

Many types in the OT illustrate the fight between the old nature and the new nature: Jacob versus Esau, Joseph versus his brothers or David versus Saul for example.

This is why Jesus emphasised the importance of self-denial; we are to deny ourselves, our old man. We die to our old life by denying it. But to deny it we must first understand that it is there and that we must have faith that God has given us a new nature; a nature that is like Christ (Eph 4:24). We choose to put off the old man.

Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter [dishonour], he will be a vessel for honour, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. 2 Tim 2:21

This is putting on the new man.

The old nature is never patched up or improved; it has been given the sentence of death by God at the cross (Rm 6:6) and we are left to implement that death day by day, by faith, until God removes the old nature at the return of Christ or at death.

These two natures are at war. The Devil constantly tempts us to put on the old nature and sin so that he can control us. By being filled with the Spirit, with faith in God, we can put on the new nature every day and walk in grace. However, if we put on the old man we sin and become flesh. The soul is a neutral vessel of the personality but when it is given over to the old nature principle it becomes flesh.

Romans 6 explains our identification with Christ, our union with Christ and the death sentence on the old man which enables us to have dominion over sin if we walk in the light. Romans 7 shows us what happens when we fail to observe this and put on the old nature and sin (Martyn Lloyd-Jones failed to understand this and claimed that this man was unregenerate). Roman 8 explains the warfare between the two natures and the victory of living in the Spirit, in the new man.

Like MLJ, Terry does not understand this and teaches one-naturism (see later). If Christians are free from sin and live in victory (as he claims) where does sin come from and where does it live in the person? Jesus told us that sin arises in the heart, hence our need to guard it (Prov 4:23). The heart is the real person and is easily corrupted (Jer 17:9-10). The old man is inside us because we have two natures. Failure to understand this is catastrophic.

Failing to understand the necessity of a testimony to Christ

Christ is the measure of the Christian.¹⁹ The standard of Christian living is not the Mosaic Law, or the Ten Commandments, but the life of Christ. This is why the Christian life can only be lived as one is in the new man and under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

The purpose of the life of faith is to manifest the life of Christ fully. Christian testimony is a living witness to Christ. This means living according to the same righteousness as Christ manifested when on earth. This means perfectly fulfilling the law as he did.

Failing to understand the necessity of the fatherly discipline of God

Hebrews 12 teaches us clearly that our Father disciplines us for our own good. Now if children do no wrong they need no discipline. In fact the passage is set in the context of striving against sin (v4).

All of us stray from God's will and this is sin. Sin is not just severe issues like stealing or murder; sin is also gossip, backbiting, and neglecting God's will in any matter. Paul tells us that discipline is correction (v9) and correction is required to deal with wrongdoing. This is why the result of discipline is holiness (v10). Paul also tells us that every Christian needs this discipline (v6, 8) because every Christian fails to live a holy life; he sins. In fact, Paul tells us that ignoring God's will results in becoming defiled (v15).

Now all sin brings guilt. Christians escape final condemnation and judgment by the blood of Christ, but this does not stop the need for correction throughout their whole lives. Complete sanctification is reserved for the coming of Christ but before this time sins need to be dealt with. We deal with sin by recognising that we are guilty for specific sins and so we confess them to our father and restore our obedient direction in repentance. Thus our whole lives are lived in constant repentance - that is always turning towards Christ and following him.

People who do not repent are not Christians. People who deny their sin are not Biblical (1 Jn 1:8). Thus Christians have to accept that they are guilty until they confess their sin and cleanse their way. This will involve grieving for their sin because they have offended their Father (Ps 31:10, 38:4-6, 51:17; Matt 5:4; 1 Cor 5:2).

Thus any teacher telling Christians that they never have any guilt is not only unbiblical, is not only dishonouring God, but is also doing terrible damage to God's flock. I fear for any such teacher.

Failing to understand the doctrine of sanctification

One aspect of this is the failing of many to admit their sin. This results in guilt that must be removed. 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (1 Jn 1:8).

Another is that Terry, like many Higher Life preachers, confuses justification by faith and thinks that sanctification is achieved also by faith.²⁰ This, in turn, confuses the three important facets of sanctification. Terry does not understand the three tenses of sanctification.

¹⁹ Eph 4:13, 'till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ'.

²⁰ Higher Life preaching varies greatly because so many different denominations were involved. However, a common theme is that understanding Rm 6 led to a crisis experience of revelation whereby a person gained faith for sanctification. Unlike Wesleyans and Holiness doctrine this was not sinless perfection but a suppression of sin.

Past tense of sanctification – sanctification in the spirit

This is the sanctification that has been completed. It was obtained by Christ's cross, resurrection and ascension and is experienced at conversion and regeneration. Thus Christians have been fully washed and sanctified (1 Cor 6:11). This is variously called by theologians 'definitive sanctification', 'legal sanctification' or 'positional sanctification'. It enables the believer to speak to God, to worship and to sit in heavenly places. It provides the Christian's heavenly standing as opposed to his earthly condition. As justification provides a legal righteousness to stand in heaven, definitive sanctification provides legal holiness to stay there.

It is also the creation of a new nature in the believer (a new heart and spirit), the new man. This resides in the human spirit and is the likeness of Christ (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). This is the channel to heaven.

Future tense of sanctification – sanctification of the body

The future tense regards the consummation of sanctification when the old nature is removed and the physical body is replaced by a spiritual body that can contain glory.

Many heretics fail to understand this and apply the benefits of future sanctification to today, such as being guilt free.

Present tense of sanctification – progressive sanctification of the soul

This explains the passages which treat sanctification as an ongoing process (e.g. Heb 2:1).

This is a progressive sanctification that is the fruit of our actions (1 Pt 1:8-9, 22; Jm 1:21). There are no meritorious works involved in gaining salvation but once we are converted we are commanded to progressively apply salvation to our souls, bit by bit.

Progressive sanctification dominates the apostolic teaching on holiness because we need constant exhortations and admonitions to progress in increasing holiness. The more we walk in faith, the more we put on the new man, the more we are renewed in knowledge, the more we learn doctrine, the more we are filled with the Spirit, the more we abide in Christ, the more holy we become in area after area of our life. This first involves mortification – dying to the old nature and self-denial.

Note Paul's commands to flee temptation (1 Cor 6:18; 1 Tim 6:11), or to strive against sin (Heb 12:4), striving to secure faith (Phil 1:27), striving to be perfect (Col 1: 28-29), or James' and Peter's command to resist the devil (Jm 4:7; 1 Pt 5:8-9). Progressive sanctification involves struggle. Terry's teaching obviates such advice because Christians are never guilty.

Failing to see that one-naturism is a heresy

Terry often teaches²¹ from Romans 6 where he argues, without qualification, that we are free from sin because we have died with Christ. He utterly fails to appreciate that we have an old nature that is still activated by deceit and temptation that must be warred with. He teaches one naturism; one victorious, sinless nature.

I remember that Terry imbibed this doctrine particularly from a certain book on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit,²² but he had already received a lot of teaching on this from

²¹For example:

http://www.terryvirgo.org/Articles/227880/Terry_Virgo/Resources/Articles/Saints_not_sinners.aspx

²² I believe it was Michael A Eaton, 'Baptism with the Spirit: the teaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones'. I do not have the time to read it all again to check.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones. As I said earlier MLJ never properly understood sanctification and admitted that for decades he didn't understand Romans 6 or 7. Sadly his exposition of this is flawed. In fact since he does not understand sanctification he even places sin in the body since he has nowhere else to put it, denying the two natures of the Christian.

MLJ taught that the old nature was destroyed, but *katargeo* in Rm 6:6 does not mean annihilation but 'made unemployed' or 'inactivated'. Thus, like Terry, MLJ considered that the state of the Christian was one nature only in which all the blessings of God were already fully evidenced and must be received by faith in God's word; the old nature has evaporated.²³ This gave him a problem with eruptions of sin. His solution was to put sin in the body, using the text, 'body of sin'.²⁴ This contradicted hundreds of Scriptures, which place sin in the human heart (something MLJ believed was transformed forever by regeneration). It also ignored the many Scriptures telling us to apply the death of Christ to ourselves and those which speak clearly of two natures (e.g. Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:5; Rm 8:13, 13:14; 1 Pt 2:11)

Part of this also results from Terry's very confused Charismatic understanding of the doctrine of the baptism in the Spirit. Terry supported Evangelical Arminian John Wesley, who thought it to be one thing, but also supported Lutheran Larry Christenson, who taught that it was something else. He also supported radical Charismatic John Wimber, who taught it was a different thing, but also supported Arminian Bryn Jones who taught it was yet something else. The list goes on; there are over a dozen claims about what the BIS means and it is all nonsense! All of these forms contradict what Paul says it is in 1 Cor 12:13 – which is the placing of regenerated believers into union with Christ by the power of the Spirit.²⁵ It has nothing to do with a second blessing, spiritual crisis, emotional / mystical experience but is a once for all event (hence aorist tense) placing all the elect into Christ.

Terry is (or at least was) a one-nature preacher and thus failed to understand that the old nature is not removed on regeneration but de-activated. It can be revived or put off at will, hence the commands to put it off. [See earlier.]

²³ *'The old man ... is non-existent, he is no longer there. If you are a Christian, the man you were in Adam has gone out of existence; he has no reality at all.'* *Exposition of Romans 6, The New Man*, Banner of Truth (1975), p65.

²⁴ By this Paul is generally referring to the expression of sin by the person. The source of sin is not the body, which is a neutral vessel. Sin arises in the heart (Matt 12:34-35, 15:18-19), which then dominates the soul, which then directs the body to sin. Some bipartite men place sin in the body since they recognise that the soul is a vessel for personality but deny the separate function of the human soul from the spirit and have no clue where the heart is. Since they can't put sin in the spirit/soul, the only place left is the body.

²⁵ 1 Cor 12:13, 'For by one Spirit we were all baptised [indicative, aorist, passive, first person plural] into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit'. The aorist demands that this is a once-for-all past event with implications afterwards.

Conclusion

Terry Virgo is a classic antinomian that has a very poor grasp of NT doctrine. The sad matter is that his teaching has impacted many thousands of people who are equally deluded.

Semi-perfectionism and the Higher Life teaching, which lies behind Terry's antinomianism, always leads to downgrading sin; it did in history (certain Higher Life preachers left their wives and committed adultery for example) and still does now. Sin becomes tolerated and excused by such folk instead of resulting in grief, confession and repentance.

Trivialising of sin is serious; God has a very strong view of sin²⁶ and the tiniest mistake is enough to damn a man forever. He who breaks one part of the law is guilty of the whole law (Jm 2:10). Growth in grace, growing more like Christ, will involve a growing sensitivity to sin, not a trivialising of it. For example, Paul connects the sin of backbiting and gossip to the sin of murder; James connected adultery to murder; no sin is trivial.²⁷

Christian liberty is not the doctrine that a believer is never guilty. Every time he puts on the old nature he is guilty. No day passes without sin being committed in thought, word or deed or by inaction (sins of commission and omission). Liberty is about ending the dominion of sin by being in Christ and being full of the Spirit; one does not have to put off the new nature, but we all do.

Liberty and non-condemnation is in the new man (Rm 8:1), being in Christ. The more one is centred in Christ, the more one is free and content.

The upshot of Terry's ministry is debilitating because it says Christians are fine, they are sin free and they can never be guilty. However, the cry of the true believer is that he is weak (2 Cor 13:4, 9), that he makes many mistakes (Jm 3:2), he is an unprofitable servant (Lk 17:10) and he is the chief of sinners (1 Tim 1:15). The true Christian is utterly dependent upon God's grace and is never confident in himself. Sadly, Terry's message teaches people the opposite.

Few Charismatics teach the necessity of mourning for sin, of having a broken and contrite heart; their messages focus upon dominionism and triumphalism. They are very different from previous generations of grieving saints that did great things for God. Life in Christ increases sensitivity to sin and a proclivity for grieving when it is committed. It is those who mourn that are blessed and comforted (Matt 5:4). Those who proudly boast in their justification are condemned (Lk 18:10-14).

Terry's triumphalism is centred in his teaching that saints are victorious and are delivered from sin perfectly now and are never guilty, failing to understand the difference between eternal things as God sees them (such as our glorification now) and the human experience in reality (glory is future). He fails to understand the difference between the heavenly standing of the believer and the earthly state of the Christian now. He fails to understand the changes that God effects when Jesus returns in glory when the old nature is then

²⁶ E.g. Ps 5:5, 'You hate all workers of iniquity'. Ezek 18:4, 'The soul who sins shall die'. Matt 7:23, 'I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"'

²⁷ Rm 1:29-30; Jm 2:11.

removed and the death sentence on it carried out. In short, Terry does not understand theology and Biblical doctrine at all.²⁸

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²⁸ Failing to understand such a vital foundational doctrine always leads to further errors. Thus Terry failed to understand many important matters. In doctrine, he advocates a mystical, emotional baptism in the Spirit and gibberish tongue speaking. He teaches apostolic authoritarianism. His doctrine of the church is false. He has allowed Messianic Christians to teach errors in his church. His Gospel was Amyraldian but he has allowed many Arminians and even Pelagians to teach. He allowed apostate Latter Rain teachings in his church. His doctrine of money and giving is unbiblical and cultic. He has allowed 'heavy-shepherding' to flourish. He allowed outright Romanism and the Mass in one conference. He allows exorcism of 'demonised' believers. He accepted the utterly foolish Latter Rain Joel's Army doctrine. He issued many failed prophecies. He produced rock bands as false worship. He encouraged being slain in the Spirit (being Mesmerised). He encouraged mystical passivity. He supported false prophet and apostate Paul Cain. He supported the false Toronto Blessing deception. He supported false prophet Todd Bentley and the apostate Lakeland Revival. He supported the false Pensacola revival. He supported the false Kansas City Prophets in writing. He supported and worked with John Wimber who brought Romanism, Eastern occultism and New Thought into the British Charismatic Movement. He supported false Pentecostal healing teachers Steve Ryder, Rodney Howard-Browne, Benson Idahosa and many others. He supported the authoritarian Fort Lauderdale Five. When David Mansell, his friend and colleague, committed serious sin Terry kept it from the church, which continued to listen to his messages on tape. The list of errors and heretics that he supported is huge. This shows a lack of discernment and knowledge.