

God Cannot Please Sinners

by Charles Finney

God cannot please sinners because their hearts and consciences are in perpetual opposition, and the gospel cannot be altered to suit their desires.

Duration: 27:18

Scripture: Matthew 5:44, Luke 13:3, Acts 17:30, Romans 2:4, Romans 6:23, Romans 8:7, 2 Corinthians 6:14

Topics: "Audio Books"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the long-suffering nature of God in sparing sinners despite their constant rebellion and fault-finding. The preacher emphasizes that nothing God does can please sinners because their hearts and consciences are opposed to Him. The sermon also highlights the torment that sinners will experience in hell, with their hearts unchanged and in enmity against God. The preacher calls for a change of heart, as it is evident that the consciences and hearts of sinners are in conflict with each other. The necessity of this change is universal, as every person has violated their conscience in following the inclinations of their hearts.

Transcript

John the Baptist was an austere man. He seems to have had very little intercourse with the people, except in his public capacity as a prophet. His message seems to have been that of reproof and rebuke in a high degree.

His diet was locusts and wild honey, and he seems to have practiced a high degree of austerity in all his habits of living. He did not visit Jerusalem as a public teacher, but continued in the wildest parts of Judea, to which places the people flocked to listen to his instruction. His habits of life, his style of preaching, his abstaining in a great measure from intercourse with the people, led his enemies to say that he had a bad spirit, and that so far he was from being a good man, he was possessed with the devil.

After the scribes and pharisees had declined receiving his doctrine under the pretense that he had a devil, Jesus Christ began his public and in his habits of life and intercourse with the people differed widely from John the Baptist. Instead of confining himself to the wilderness of Judea, he visited most of the principal places and especially spent considerable time at Jerusalem as a public teacher. He was affable in his deportment, mingled with great ease and holy civility with almost all classes of persons for the purpose of instructing them in the great doctrines of salvation.

He did not hesitate to comply with the invitations of the pharisees, and great men of the nation should dine with them, and on all occasions was forward in administering such reproof and instruction as was suited to the circumstances and characters of those with whom he associated. But when the pharisees listened to his doctrines, they were filled with indignation, and seized hold of all the easy and gentlemanly manner in which he accommodated himself to all classes of people that he might give them instruction, and objected to him that he was a gluttonous man, a winebiber, a friend of publicans and sinners. They objected to John that he was morose and sour, that he had a denunciatory spirit and was therefore possessed with the devil, and to Christ they objected that he was on the opposite extreme, that he was too affable and familiar with all classes of people, that he was not only a gluttonous man and a winebiber, but he was the friend of publicans and sinners.

In speaking from these words, I design to illustrate the following proposition, that God cannot please sinners. Some people are apt to imagine that it is a misrepresentation of God's character that creates so much opposition to him in this world. Sometimes it is true that his character is greatly misrepresented, and when his character is thus misrepresented, the consciences of men are opposed to him.

But they are no better pleased when his character is truly represented, for then their hearts are opposed to him. It is a matter of fact that only needs to be stated, to be admitted, that upon the subject of religion, the heart and the conscience of impenitent sinners are opposed to each other. That which their hearts love, their consciences condemn, and that which their consciences approve, their hearts hate.

Their consciences approve the character of God as it is, but to this character their hearts are utterly opposed, as I have shown when treating upon the subject of total depravity in number five of this series. If the character of God should be so altered as to conciliate and please their wicked heart, their conscience would condemn it. To the holiness of God their hearts are bitterly opposed.

To deny this is as absurd as it is false. To maintain that an impenitent heart is not opposed to holiness is the same as to maintain that an impenitent heart is not impenitent. Impenitence is the love of sin, but sin and holiness are direct opposites.

To say then that an impenitent heart is not opposed to holiness is to say that opposites are not opposites. God is definitely holy and therefore the impenitent heart is wholly opposed to him, but suppose he was infinitely sinful, would sinners be better pleased with him than they are at present? No. They would make war upon him because he was so wicked.

Their consciences would then condemn him and although their hearts would be conciliated, their conscience and their better judgment would be utterly opposed to him. Men are so constituted that they cannot approve the character of a wicked being. No man ever approved of the character of the devil, and wicked men are opposed to both God and the devil for opposite reasons.

They hate God with their hearts because he is so holy, and in their consciences condemn the devil because he is so wicked. Again, sinners do not like the mercy of God in view of the conditions upon which it is to be exercised, nor would they like him if he were unmerciful. If they liked his mercy with its conditions, they would accept forgiveness and would no longer be impenitent sinners.

This is a matter of fact, but if he were unmerciful, then they would certainly be opposed to him. Again, they do not like the precept of his law as it is, nor would they approve of it if it were altered. When they behold its perfection, their hearts rise up against it, but if it were imperfect and allowed some degree of sin, their

consciences would condemn it.

Let the precept of law remain as it is, or alter it as you will, and sinners are and will be displeased. The law now requires perfect holiness, and for this reason the sinner's heart is entirely opposed to it, but suppose it required entire sinfulness, then his conscience would utterly condemn it. Let it be of a mixed character and require some holiness and some sin, and as far as it requires holiness, their heart would hate it, and in as far as it required sin, their conscience would condemn it.

So upon the whole, they would be as far from being satisfied as they are now. First, they do not like the rule of conduct which it prescribes. It requires that men be holy as God is holy, and requires the same strictness and perfection as does the moral law, but this is a great offense to their hearts.

Suppose it prescribed a different rule of conduct and lowered its claim as to suit the sinful inclinations of men, and their consciences would oppose it. What, they would say, is the gospel to repeal the moral law? Does it make Christ the minister of sin? Is it a raid against the government of God, and does it permit rebellion against his throne? What sort of gospel is this? To this, their consciences would entirely object. Again, sinners do not like the conditions of the gospel.

Now, would they be satisfied if they were altered? The conditions are repentance and faith, but to these, the sinner's heart is opposed. To hate his sins, to trust in Christ for salvation, is asking too much to obtain the consent of his heart. But suppose the gospel offered to pardon and save without repentance and faith, though this the sinner's conscience and his common sense would object.

What, he would say, shall the gospel offer pardon while they continue their rebellion? Shall men be saved in their sins? It is absurd and impossible. And shall men be saved without faith in Christ? Shall they be received and pardoned while they make God a liar? Shall they go to heaven without believing there is a heaven? Shall they escape hell when they do not believe there is a hell? Shall they ever find their way to everlasting life when they have no confidence in the testimony of God and will not walk in the only way that will conduct them there? Impossible! A gospel that pretends to save on such conditions must be from hell. Now, suppose you let the conditions of the gospel remain as they are, or alter them in any possible way, and the sinner is not satisfied.

They commend themselves to his conscience as they are, but they are a great offense to his heart. Alter them so as to conciliate his heart, and you offend his conscience. And while the sinner remains impenitent, there is no conceivable alternation that would please him.

The fact is that sinners are at continual war with themselves. Their hearts and consciences are in perpetual opposition to each other. One view of a subject will please their hearts and offend their consciences, and another view of it will satisfy their consciences but arouse the enmity of their hearts.

And while they are in this state, it is plainly impossible to please them. Again, sinners do not like the means of grace as they are, nor would they be satisfied if any other means were used to save them. They do not like the doctrines that ministers preach when they preach the truth.

Now would they be satisfied if they preached error. If they came out with pure doctrines of the gospel and bear down upon the hearts and consciences of men with the claims of God, their hearts arise in instant rebellion. This they say is an abominable doctrine, but if the minister lets down the high claims of the gospel, their conscience is dissatisfied.

And the sinner, if he is well instructed, says that the minister is afraid to tell the truth, that he is daubing with untempered mortar, that he is deceiving the people and leading them down to hell. Again, sinners are displeased if the church exercises discipline and turn out unworthy members, and they are also displeased if they do not do it. If a church suffered disorderly and wicked persons in their communion, their consciences are opposed to this.

They say these church members are all hypocrites to sanction such conduct as this. What? Have fellowship with such persons? The church can never prosper while they retain in their communion such hypocrites. By having fellowship with them, they show that they approve their deeds.

But if on the other hand, the church rise up and excommunicate these offending members, then their hearts are disturbed. They maintain that the church are persecuting some of its best members. They think that the proceedings of the church are very uncharitable to deal thus with persons who for ought they can see are as good as any persons in the church.

Cases of this kind have occurred where the excommunicated members have been advised by the ungodly to prosecute the church for slander. The truth is that while sinners continue to be so inconsistent with themselves, nothing upon the subject of religion can please them. What is right offends their hearts, and what is wrong offends their consciences.

I shall conclude this subject with several remarks. First, from what has been said, you can see why it is that sinners find it impossible to rest in any form of error until their consciences become seared as with hot iron. It is affecting to see how many persons there are who are making continual efforts to hide themselves behind some refuge of lies.

These errors are continual to their feelings, and they want to believe them. And in the excitement of debate or in view of some glowing exhibition of their error, when it is exhibited as if it were sober truth, they feel as if they did believe it. And while the excitement lasts, they seem to rest in it.

But when the tumult of feelings subsides and an enlightened conscience can gain a hearing, it gives forth the sentence of condemnation against their favorite heresy. Conscience comes forth and writes falsehood upon the very head in front of it. Two, from this subject, you can see that a minister whose preaching pleases the hearts of sinners cannot commend themselves to their consciences in the sight of God.

Many ministers seem to aim at conciliating the feelings of the impenitent part of their congregation. They seem to consider it an evidence of their wisdom and prudence that their preaching has so much favor with the ungodly. Now, let these sinners be converted, and they will lose their confidence in such a minister.

Their consciences, if enlightened, have never been satisfied with him. They have praised his preaching and love to hear him because he has commended himself to their hearts, and not because he has commended himself to their consciences. If then, they are truly converted, and their hearts are brought over to take sides with their conscience, it is highly probable that they will go away and join some other congregation, if another is within reach.

And where in such cases they do not do this, there is reason to fear that they are not truly converted. But where a ministry preaches to the conscience and sinners get angry and go away, if ever they are converted, they will desire to come back again and set under the preaching that used to so disturb them while in their sins. Three, from this subject, you can see that where Christians try to gain influence with

sinners by bringing down their religion so as to conciliate their feelings while in their sins, they will never, by this kind of influence, do the sinner any good.

For while by this course they please the heart of sinners, their consciences condemn them. And while their consciences condemn the course they take, it is impossible that this course should do them any good. Four, God so speaks and conducts as to commend himself to every man's conscience.

The sinner's heart is entirely opposed to God, but God pursues such a course as not to leave himself without a witness in the sinner's breast. Conscience will testify for God. Now, it is certain that the sinner's heart must be reconciled to God, for he is eternally miserable.

His judgment and conscience will always bear witness that God is right. And unless the heart is brought over to take sides with conscience, it is self-evident that the sinner must be damned. Five, ministers and Christians should take the same course that God does, should so live and speak as to commend themselves to the sinner's conscience.

If we live so as to have the sinner's conscience on our side, however much he may hate us now, it is certain that he must love us, or he must be damned. If we have done that, which his conscience approved, he must be reconciled to us, or God will never be reconciled to him. Six, you see from this subject why it is where persons are converted, they often manifest the greatest attachment to those Christians whom they hated previous to their conversion.

Those Christians that lead the most holy lives are most apt to be hated by impenitent sinners, and it often happens that the more they reprove and warn and rebuke them, the more sinners will hate them. But if those sinners become truly converted, you will always see that they have the most confidence in those very persons. The reason is their hearts are changed.

Their conscience took part with the faithful Christian before, and now they are converted. Both heart and conscience approve his character. Seven, you see from this subject that temporizing with sinners, letting down, concealing, or evading the claims of the gospel can do them no good.

To attempt to please them while in their sins is but to ruin them if we succeed. Their hearts must be changed, and the only way to affect this is by taking the deepest hold upon conscience. That is possible.

Instead of expecting to change the heart by concealing the offensive features of the gospel, we need only expect to change it by spreading out before the conscience the claims of God in all their length and breadth. The heart is to be brought over through instrumentality of conscience, and the more fully the claims of God are represented to the conscience, the more likely the sinner is to be converted. To conceal the truth from conscience and attempt to win the sinner over by a lovely song is but to lull him with a siren's voice until he plunges into eternal death.

Eight, you see from this subject why it is that convicted sinners often manifest the greatest opposition just before they submit to God. It is often the case that the more conscience is pressed, the more the sinner is fretted, and the more he will rebel. And when the conscience is thoroughly enlightened and has obtained a firm footing so as to exert its utmost power from the heart, a desperate and outrageous conflict often ensues.

And in the madness of his exasperated feelings, the sinner is sometimes almost ready to blaspheme the God of heaven. And it is often observed that sinners will be the most high-handed in the outbreaks of

their enmity, while conscience is taking its most thorough lessons from the truth and spirit of God. But when feeling has in a measure exhausted its turbulence, the power of truth presented by the spirit of God exerts upon the heart such tremendous power through the conscience as to make the sinner quail, throw down his weapons, and submit to God.

Nine, from this subject you can see the long suffering of God in sparing sinners. How amazing it is that he spares them so long, notwithstanding all their unreasonable fault-finding and rebellion. Nothing that he does pleases them, and nothing that he can do would please them.

What would you think of your children if they should conduct in such a manner towards you? Suppose they had never obeyed you and had never so much as meant to obey you. When you have conducted in such a way as to commend yourself to their consciences, their hearts opposed you. And when you have commanded yourself to their hearts, their consciences opposed you, so that upon the whole you have not and cannot please them.

They are always displeased and murmuring at whatever you do. Oh, how little patience would the kindest earthly parents have with their children when compared with the long suffering of the blessed God. Ten, you see that it is of no use for God to try to please you, sinner, while you in your sins.

Sinners often seem to imagine that if God was such a being as they would have him, they should love him. They do not realize that if they framed a God to suit their hearts, they would fail of appeasing their consciences. Sinner, your conscience approves of the character of God as it is.

If his character could be altered in any conceivable degree, it would upon the whole please you no better than it does now while you are in your sins. For if you could alter his character as to satisfy your heart, you would only outrage your conscience. And the only possible way for you to be happy is to change yourself instead of expecting or desiring that God should change.

Eleven, the necessity of a change of heart is self-evident. It is a fact of universal experience that the consciences and hearts of sinners are opposing to each other, and this is even true where the light of the gospel is never shown. That men in following the inclination of their hearts have violated their consciences is known and acknowledged by every nation under heaven.

However absurd and foolish their ideas of God have been, yet their sacrifices show that they have violated their consciences, and there is probably not a man on earth who can honestly say that in the indulgence of his heart, he has not violated his conscience. An enlightened conscience will never change. Its testimony will be louder and louder in favor of truth forever.

There must be a change, for there can be no inward peace, and this change must plainly be in the heart and not in the conscience. Twelve, you can see the nature of hell torments. Sinners are often thrown into great agony in this life by the internal struggles and jangles of their consciences and hearts.

Now let them go into eternity with their hearts unchanged. Let the full blaze of eternity's light be poured upon their consciences, and with a heart of enmity against God, what horrible rebellion, what insupportable conflicting and quarreling with self, and with God will this sinner experience. With a conscience that sternly takes the part of God, and a heart that supremely hates him, what a fire of hell will such a conflict kindle up in the sinner's breast.

Lastly, sinners should not follow their feelings, but obey the voice of conscience. In other words, where sinners find their feelings opposed to their better judgment, they will often set down their foot and resist the current of their feelings. They will say, I am not going to be carried away and throw up the reins to my feelings.

I must exercise my judgment. I must act like a reasonable being. But oh, on the subject of religion, how perfectly men give themselves up to their wicked hearts.

Sinner, you ought this moment to come forth promptly and act like a man and say you will not go another step in the way of death. Why throw up the reins and give loose to passion? Why drive with such furious haste to hell? Why suffer yourself to be carried hither and thither by every gush of feeling and by every breath of emotion that passes over the surface of your soul? Why, sinner, if you do not exercise your reason, if you do not listen to the voice of conscience, if you do not gather up the reins, gird up your loins, and address yourself to the work of your salvation like a man, if you do not make up your mind to resist the whole tide of your carnal feelings and put yourself under the clear blaze of heaven's light, and when conscience gives forth from its verdict, unless you will promptly obey, you must die in your sins. And now will you hear in the house of God, while your character and danger are before you, while mercy waits to save and death brandishes his weapon to destroy, while heaven calls and hell groans, while the spirit strives and Christians pray, will you have the moral courage, the decision of character, the honesty and manhood to resolve on immediate submission to Jesus Christ?

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