

Why Sinners Hate God

by Charles Finney

Sinners hate God because he is irreconcilably opposed to their selfishness and because he requires unqualified obedience to the law of right.

Scripture: Psalm 10:4, Isaiah 53:3, Matthew 5:10-12, John 3:19-20, John 15:25, Romans 8:7, Galatians 5:17, 2 Timothy 3:12, James 4:4, 1 John 3:13

Topics: "Hatred Of God", "Human Sinfulness"

Description

Charles Finney explores the profound reasons behind why sinners harbor hatred towards God, emphasizing that their enmity is not justified by any inherent flaw in God's nature or moral governance. He argues that sinners hate God because He opposes their selfish desires and demands obedience, which they are unwilling to submit to. Finney asserts that the very qualities that sinners despise in God--His holiness, goodness, and impartiality--are the reasons they should love Him instead. Ultimately, he concludes that the hatred of sinners is a reflection of their own selfishness and depravity, and that their guilt is magnified by their rejection of the Gospel. This sermon serves as a stark reminder of the moral conflict between divine righteousness and human sinfulness.

Transcript

JOHN XV. 25. --["]They have hated me without a cause."

These are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. In my two former discourses on total depravity, I have endeavoured to demonstrate that all impenitent sinners hate God supremely. And having, as I suppose, established this doctrine beyond controversy, by an appeal to matters of fact, it now becomes a very solemn and important question, why sinners hate God?

If sinners have good reason for hating God, then they are not to blame for it; but if they have no good reason, or if they hate him when they ought to love him, then they have incurred great guilt by their enmity to God.

In speaking from this subject, I design,

1st. To show what is not the reason of their hatred.

2d. What is the reason of it.

3. That they hate him for the very reasons for which they ought to love him.

I. I am to show what is not the reason of their hatred.

1st. It is not because God has so constituted them, that they have a physical or constitutional aversion to God. The text affirms that sinners have hated God without a cause. Not that there is no reason why they hate him; but no good reason. Not that there is strictly no cause for their hatred, for every effect must have some cause; but there is no just cause. If God had so created man that he was under a physical necessity of hating his Maker this would, not only be a cause, but a just cause for hating him. If God had incorporated with the very substance of his being a constitutional aversion to himself; this would be a sufficient cause, not only for the sinner's hating him, but a good reason why all other beings should hate him.

2d. The sinner's hatred of God, is not caused by any hereditary or transmitted disposition to hate him. A disposition to hate God, is itself hatred. Disposition is an action of the mind, and not a part of the mind itself. It is, therefore, absurd, to talk of an hereditary or transmitted disposition to love or hate God, or any thing else. It is impossible that a voluntary state of mind should be hereditary, or transmitted from one generation to another.

If any of you understand by disposition, a propensity, or temper; not an action, which is not a voluntary state of mind; but a quality or attribute, that is part of a mind itself, I say,

3d. That the sinner's hatred is not caused by any such attribute, or property, that makes a part of the mind, and which in itself, has a natural and necessary aversion to God.

4th. There is no just cause in the constitution of our nature, for opposition to God. The nature of man, is as it should be. Its powers are as God made them. He has made them in the best manner, in which infinite power, and goodness and wisdom could make them. They are perfectly adapted to the service of his Creator; and if we survey all the exquisite mechanism, and delicate organization of the body, and scrutinize all the properties, and powers, and capacities, of the mind, we can find no just cause of complaint; but on the other hand, infinite reason to love, and adore the great architect, and exclaim with the Psalmist, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made."

5th. There is no just cause for the sinner's hatred, in that wise and benevolent arrangement, by which all men have descended from one common ancestor; and under which divine arrangement, we are naturally, (not necessarily) influenced; and our characters modified by the circumstances under which we have our being. Our being so constituted, as naturally to influence each other, and be highly instrumental in modifying each other's character, is a wise and benevolent arrangement of the highest importance to the universe; but like every other good thing, is liable to great abuse; and by how much the more powerful our influence is, to promote virtue when we do right, by just so much the greater is our influence to promote vice when we do wrong.

6th. Again. There is no cause for the sinner's hatred in the moral government of God. His commandments are not grievous, nor impossible to be obeyed, nor calculated to produce misery when obeyed; but on the contrary, "his yoke is easy, and his burden is light." His commandments are easily obeyed; and obedience naturally results in happiness. If God had established a government, the requirements of which were so high, that it was extremely difficult to yield obedience to his laws; if the laws were so obscure and intricate, and difficult to understand, that an honest mind were in great danger of mistaking the real meaning of his

requirements; or if his laws were arbitrary, unnecessary, and capricious; or if they were guarded by unjust and cruel sanctions; if any of these things were true, sinners would have a just cause to hate God. But not one of them is true.

Again. Sinners have no just cause for their hatred in the requirements of the Gospel. If the conditions of salvation, held forth in the Gospel, were arbitrary, capricious, or unjust; if it were impossible to comply with them; if the terms of salvation were put so high, that men have not natural power to obey them, and fulfil the conditions upon which their salvation is suspended; if God commanded them to repent, when they had no power to repent; if he required them to believe, when they had no power to believe; and threatened to send them to hell, for not repenting and believing; in any and in all these cases, sinners would have just reason to hate God. But none of these things are true. The conditions of the Gospel so far from being arbitrary, are indispensable in their nature to salvation; so far from being put so high, that it is impossible, or even difficult to comply with them; they are brought down as low as they possibly can be, without rendering the sinner's salvation impossible. Repentance and faith, are indispensable to fit the soul for the enjoyment of heaven; and if God should dispense with these conditions, and consent that the sinner should remain in his sins, it would render the sinner's damnation certain.

Again. Not only are the conditions of salvation necessary in their own nature, but it is easy to comply with them. Much easier than to reject them. Our powers of mind, are as well suited to accept, as to reject the Gospel. The motives to accept are infinitely greater than to reject the offers of mercy. So weighty, indeed, are the motives to comply with the conditions of the Gospel, that sinners often find it difficult to resist them, and they are under the necessity of making almost ceaseless efforts to maintain themselves in impenitence and unbelief.

Again. There is no just cause for hating God, in his providential government of the world.

There is no reason to doubt, that God so administers his providential government, as to produce upon the whole, the highest and most salutary practicable influence in favour of holiness. It is manifest that his moral laws are guarded by the highest possible sanctions; that all has been done which the perfection of moral government could do, to secure universal holiness in the world. So it is true, beyond all reasonable doubt, that his physical or providential government, is administered in the wisest possible manner.

It is doubtless administered solely for the benefit, and in support of moral government. It is so arranged as to bring out and exert the highest moral influence, that such a government is capable of exerting. Many sinners talk as if they supposed God might have administered his governments, both moral and providential, in a manner vastly more judicious and more highly calculated to secure perfection in the moral conduct of his subjects. They seem to think, that because God is almighty, he therefore can work any conceivable absurdity or contradiction. That he can secure perfection in moral agents, by the exercise of physical omnipotence, and that the existence of sin in our world, is proof conclusive, that, although on some accounts he is opposed to sin, yet upon the whole, he prefers its existence to holiness in its stead. They seem to take it for granted, that the two governments which God exercises over the universe, moral and providential, might have been so administered, as to have produced universal holiness throughout the universe; but this is a gratuitous and most wicked assumption. It is no fair inference from the omnipotence and omniscience of God; and the assumption is founded upon an erroneous view of the nature of moral agency, and of moral government.

Again. There is no just cause for hatred, in any thing that belongs to the character of God. There is nothing hateful or repellant to any just mind, in any view that can be taken of the character of Jehovah. But on the contrary, his character comprehends every conceivable or possible excellence.

Again. There is no just cause for hatred in the conduct of God. There is no inconsistency between his conduct and his professions. Some people seem to have conceived of God, as a sly, artful, hypocritical being, who says one thing and means another; who professes great abhorrence of sin, yet so conducts himself, and the affairs of his kingdom, as necessarily and purposely to produce it; who commands men to keep his law, on pain of eternal death, and after all, prefers that they should break it; who commands all men to repent, and believe the Gospel, yet has made atonement but for the elect; who, while he requires them to repent, has so constituted them, that he knows they are unable to repent; professes greatly to desire the salvation of all men, and yet has suspended their salvation upon impossible conditions. Indeed, many seem to represent the conduct, and professions of God, at everlasting variance with each other; and as making up a complicated tissue of contradiction, absurdity, and hypocrisy. But all such representations are a libel upon his infinitely fair and upright conduct.

Again. There is nothing unkind or unnecessarily severe in the conduct of God, toward the inhabitants of this world. There has been a great deal of complaint of his conduct among sinners; they have often complained of the injustice of his dealings, and have sometimes inquired what they had done, that he should chastise them with such severity. But all such complainings only prove their own perverseness, and can never fasten any just suspicion upon the conduct of God.

II. Sinners do hate God because they are supremely selfish; and he is, as he ought to be, infinitely opposed to their supreme object of pursuit. The first thing that we discover in the conduct of little children, is, the desire of self-gratification. At what period of their existence, this desire becomes selfishness, is impossible for us to say. That a proper desire to gratify an appetite for food, and drink, and all our constitutional appetites, is not sinful is manifest. These appetites have no moral character, and their proper indulgence is not sinful. But whenever their indulgence is inordinate, or whenever the indulgence of our appetites comes in collision with the requirements of God; whenever, and wherever we indulge our constitutional propensities, when we are under an obligation to abstain from an indulgence, in every such case we sin, for in all these cases we are selfish; we make our own indulgence the rule of our duty, instead of the requirement of God. We consent to indulge ourselves at the public expense, and in a way that is inconsistent with the glory of God, and the highest good of his universe. This is the essence, and the history of all sin. Now, at whatever period of our existence we first prefer self-gratification to our duty to God, when we first make self-gratification the supreme object of choice; at what particular moment self-gratification comes to be the ruling principle of our conduct, and the highest aim of our lives, it is perhaps impossible for us to determine.

But whenever this may be, this is the commencement of our depravity. It is our first moral act. It constitutes our first moral character. Every thing that has preceded this, has had no moral character at all. The Bible assures us that this occurs so early in our history, that it may be said, that, "the wicked are estranged from the womb. That they go astray, as soon as they be born, speaking lies." This language is not, of course, to be understood literally, because we do not speak at all, as soon as we are born: but the wicked speak lies, as soon as they do speak. Behold, says the Psalmist, "I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." This language also, is certainly figurative; for it cannot be possible, that the substance of a conceived fetus should be sin! This would contradict God's own definition of sin. He says, "sin is a transgression of the law;" but the law prescribes a rule of action, and not a mode of

existence. If the substance of a conceived fetus is sin: if the child itself, previous to birth, is a sin, then God has committed it. All that can possibly be meant by this, and similar passages, without making utter nonsense of the word of God; without arraying different passages in everlasting contradiction to each other, is, that we were always sinners from the commencement of our moral existence,--from the earliest moment of the exercise of moral agency. And to insist upon the literal understanding of such passages as these, is the most dangerous perversion of the Bible. Adopt the principle of interpretation, that insists upon these passages being understood literally, and apply it, in the exposition of the whole Bible, and you will prove, not only that sin and holiness are substances, but that God is a material being. Indeed, here has been the great error, on the subject of depravity. This grand rule of interpretation, that all language is to be understood, according to the nature of the subject to which it is applied, has been overlooked, and the same meaning has often been attached to the same word, whether applied to matter or to mind. For instance, to set aside God's definition of sin, as consisting entirely in the transgression of law, and bring in those figurative expressions, that would seem, unexplained by God's own definition, to represent sin, as consisting in something else, than voluntary transgression; is to array the Scripture in irreconcilable contradiction to itself, by overlooking one of the most important rules of Biblical interpretation.

It is to trifle with the word of God. It is tempting the Holy Ghost. It is a stupid, not to say a willful perversion of the truth of God. Now, the great reason why sinners are opposed to God, is not, that there is any defect in their nature, rendering their opposition physically necessary, but because he is irreconcilably opposed to their selfishness. He is infinitely opposed to the supreme end of their pursuit, that is, to their obtaining happiness, in a way that is inconsistent with HIS glory, and the happiness of other beings.

The supreme end at which they aim, is to promote their own happiness, in a way that is inconsistent with the public good. To this he is infinitely opposed. As they have an unholy end in view, the means which they use to accomplish this end are, of course, as wicked as the end. God is therefore, as much opposed to the means which they use as to the end which they are endeavouring to accomplish by those means. These means make up the history of their lives. They are all designed, directly, or indirectly, to affect the all-absorbing object at which the sinner aims, the promotion of his own happiness. God is, therefore, as he ought to be, sincerely and conscientiously, and infinitely opposed to every thing they do or say, while in a state of inpenitency. They would make every thing subordinate to their own private interests. He insists upon it, that they shall seek their happiness, in a way that is consistent with, and calculated to promote the happiness of the whole. This is, after, all the only way in which, in the very nature of things, they can be happy. He accordingly sets himself with full purpose of heart, to defeat every attempt which they make to obtain happiness in their own way. He is the irreconcilable adversary of all their selfish schemes. He embitters every cup of selfish joy, "turns their" selfish "council headlong; and brings down their violent dealing upon their own pate."

Thus you see that sinners hate God, because he is so holy. While they remain selfish, and he is infinitely benevolent, their characters, their designs, their desires, and all their ways are diametrically opposed to his, and his to theirs. They are direct opposites; and until they change, it will always be true as he has said, "I loathe them, and they abhor me."

Holiness is a regard to right. God requires, upon infinite penalties, that every moral being in the universe should do and feel and say, that which is perfectly right; less than this, he cannot require without injustice. But sinners are unwilling to do right. They would be at liberty to consult their own private interest in every thing, and they of course consider God as an enemy, because he insists upon their unqualified obedience to the law of right, however perfectly it counteracts their selfish schemes.

Again. Sinners hate God because he is so good. He is good and does good, and moves on in the promotion of the public interest in a way that often overturns and scatters to the winds, all their selfish projects and Babel-towers upon which they are attempting to climb to heaven. His heart is so set upon doing good, that in the prosecution of his great design, he has often overthrown families and nations that stood in his way; and once, he overwhelmed a world of sinners in a flood to prevent their mischief, and bring the world back into such a state, that, through the introduction of the law and Gospel, he might reclaim mankind, and save a multitude from hell.

Again. Sinners hate God, because he is impartial. They view their own interest as of supreme importance, and are laying themselves out to make every thing in the universe bend to it. They would have the weather, the winds, and the whole material and moral universe, conform to the great object they have in view, to consummate and perpetuate their own happiness. But as God has an end in view entirely diverse from theirs; as his object is to promote the general happiness, and the happiness of individuals, only so far as is consistent with the happiness and rights of other beings, he continually thwarts them in their favourite projects. The very elements of the material universe, are so arranged and governed, as often to make shipwreck of their fondest hopes, and annihilate forever their most fondly cherished expectations.

But this is not all. Sinners hate God because he threatens to punish them for their sins. He will not compromise with them; he insists upon their obedience, or their damnation. He requires their repentance and reformation, or the everlasting destruction of their souls. Now, either alternative is supremely hateful to an impenitent sinner. To repent, heartily to confess that God is right, and he is wrong; to take God's part against himself; to give up the pursuit of his own happiness, as the supreme object of desire; to dedicate himself with all he is and has to the service of God and the promotion of the public interest; is what he is utterly unwilling to do; and inasmuch as God insists upon it, will make no compromise, but demands unqualified and unconditional submission to his will, or the eternal damnation of his soul; the sinner is entirely unreconciled to either. He considers God as his infinite and almighty adversary, and makes war upon him with all his heart.

III. I am to show, that sinners hate God for the very reasons for which they ought to love him. They are the very reasons for which all holy beings do love him. His opposition to all sin, and to all injurious conduct of every kind; his high regard to individual, and general happiness; and in short, all the reasons for which selfish beings are so much opposed to him, are the foundation of obligation to love him, and are the reasons why reasonable beings, that have any regard to the moral fitness of things, feel it right, and infinitely obligatory in them, to love their Maker. He deserves to be loved for these reasons, and for no other. And it is for these, and no other reasons that sinners hate him. They do not hate him because he deserves their hatred, but because he deserves their love. It is not because he is wicked, but because he is good. It is not because they have any good reason to hate him, but because they have every possible reason to love him. I mean just as I say. Sinners not only hate God, in spite of infinitely strong reasons for loving him; but for these very reasons. Not only is it true, that these reasons for loving him do not prevent their hating him, but they are the very reasons for which they hate him.

I shall conclude this discourse with several remarks.

1st. From this subject you can see the ridiculous hypocrisy of infidels. It is very common for them to profess in their investigations and inquiries after truth, to be impartial. They insist upon it that Christians are already committed, and are therefore incapable of giving Christianity a candid and unbiased examination. Christians, they say, cannot make up a judgment to be relied upon, because they are already

committed in favour of Christianity. But infidels seem to suppose that they are in circumstances to make up an unbiased and enlightened judgment; and to examine and decide without prejudice. But this is utterly absurd. They are not on neutral ground, as they suppose themselves to be. They are committed against the Bible. That they are the enemies of God, is demonstrated by their conduct, entirely irrespective of the Bible. That their lives are such as no good being can approve; such as God if he is holy must abhor, is a plain matter of fact. It needs no Bible to prove this. Now, here is a book claiming to be a revelation from God, demanding of them holiness of heart and life; and threatening them for their sins with eternal death. Now, is it not absurd? Is it not ridiculous and hypocritical, for these enemies of God, committed as they are against God, and against this revelation, to set themselves up as the only impartial judges?

They can sit down to the investigation of the subject without bias. They are on neutral ground. They feel no such prepossessions as to misguide their judgment. The fact is, admitting that Christians are as much prejudiced in favour of Christianity, as infidels say they are: still, unless infidels will admit that Christians are perfect, that they are wholly sinless, and entirely devoted to God; it will appear after all, that Christians are not so liable to be prejudiced in favour of Christianity, as infidels are against it. Infidels are entirely opposed to God, and all impenitent sinners, as I have shown in the two former discourses, are totally depraved; and until Christians are entirely perfect, they will not be so completely biased in favour of God, as sinners are in favour of the devil. They will not until then, of course, be so liable to misjudge in favour of the Bible, as sinners will be against it.

Christians, being upon the whole in favour of God, and therefore feeling a strong attachment to the Bible, and yet, having much remaining sin about them; and therefore liable to feel many objections to the strictness of its claims; are in the best circumstances, and in the most favourable state of mind of any beings in this world, to judge impartially. They are not so wicked as to reject what they see to be true, nor so obsequiously disposed, as blindly to submit to every thing that pretends to have a claim upon their obedience without investigation. By this I do not mean that Christians are better qualified to judge of the truth of the Christian religion, than if they were perfect; but I do mean to repel the absurd assertions of infidels, that the Christian's faith is nothing more than a blind credulity. There never was at any time, piety enough in the church, to bear the restraints of pure Christianity, if the evidence in its favour, did not come upon them with the power of demonstration.

2nd. From this subject you can see, that the wicked CONDUCT of sinners is no proof that their NATURE IS SINFUL. The universal sinfulness of men, has been supposed to conduct to the inevitable conclusion, that the nature of man must be in itself sinful. It has been said that in no other way, can the universally sinful conduct of men be accounted for. It has been maintained, that an effect must be of the same nature of its cause; and that as the effects or actions of our nature are universally sinful, that therefore the nature or cause must be sinful.

But if the effect must be of the same nature of its cause, if the cause must have the same nature of the effect, then God must be a material being, for he is the cause of the existence of all matter, and therefore he must himself be material. The soul of man must also be material. It acts upon his material body, and causes his body to act upon other material things around him, and as it is constantly effecting material changes on every hand, the soul must be material. This would, indeed, be a short-hand method of disposing of the existence of all spirits. But who will after all admit of this mode of argumentation, and adopt, as a serious and grave truth, the absurd dogma that the character of an effect, decides in all cases the character or nature of its cause.

The universally sinful conduct of men is easily and naturally accounted for, upon the principles of this discourse. They universally adopt, in the outset, the principle of selfishness as their grand rule of action, and this from the very laws of their mental constitution, vitiates all their moral conduct, and gives a sinful character to every moral action.

If it be asked how it happens that children universally adopt the principle of selfishness, unless their nature is sinful, I answer, that they adopt this principle of self-gratification or selfishness, because they possess human nature, and come into being under the peculiar circumstances in which all the children of Adam are born since the fall: but not because human nature is itself sinful. The cause of their becoming sinners, is to be found in their nature's being what it is, and surrounded by the peculiar circumstances of temptation to which they are exposed in a world of sinners.

All the constitutional appetites and propensities of body and mind, are in themselves innocent; but when strongly excited are a powerful temptation to prohibited indulgence. To these constitutional appetites or propensities, so many appeals of temptation are made, as universally to lead human beings to sin. Adam was created in the perfection of manhood, certainly not with a sinful nature, and yet, an appeal to his innocent constitutional appetites led him into sin. If adult Adam, without a sinful nature, and after a season of obedience and perfect holiness, was led to change his mind by an appeal to his innocent constitutional propensities, how can the fact that infants, possessing the same nature with Adam, and surrounded by circumstances of still greater temptation, universally fall into sin, prove that their nature is itself sinful? Is such an inference called for? Is it legitimate? What, holy and adult Adam, is led, by an appeal to his innocent constitution to adopt the principle of selfishness, and no suspicion is, or can be entertained, that he had a sinful nature; but if little children under circumstances of temptation, aggravated by the fall, are led into sin, we are to believe that their nature is sinful! This is wonderful philosophy; and what heightens the absurdity is, that in order to admit the sinfulness of nature, we must believe sin to consist in the substance of the constitution, instead of voluntary action, which is a thing impossible.

And that which stamps the inference of a sinful nature with peculiar guilt is, that in making it we reject God's own declaration that "sin is a transgression of law," and adopt a definition which is perfectly absurd.

3d. From the view of depravity presented in these discussions, it is easy to see in what sense sin is natural to sinners, and what has led mankind to ascribe the outbreakings of sin to their nature; as if their nature was itself sinful.

All experience shows, that from the laws of our constitution we are influenced in our conduct directly or indirectly by the supreme preference of our minds. In other words, when we desire a thing supremely, it is natural to us to pursue this object of desire; we may have desires for an object which we do not pursue. But it is a contradiction to say that we do not pursue the object of supreme desire. Supreme desire is nothing else than a supreme or controlling choice, and as certain as the will controls the actions; so certainly, and so naturally, shall we pursue that object which we supremely desire. The fact, therefore, that sinners adopt the principle of supreme selfishness, renders it certain and natural, while their selfishness continues to be predominant, that they will sin, and only sin, and this is in strict accordance with, or rather the result of the laws of their mental constitution. While they maintain their supreme selfishness, obedience is impossible. This is the reason why "the carnal mind, or the minding of the flesh, is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." No wonder, therefore, that sinners, whose supreme preference is selfish, should find it very natural for them to sin, and extremely difficult to do any thing else than sin. This being a fact of universal observation, has led mankind to ascribe the sins of men to their nature; and

a great deal of fault has been found with nature itself; when the fact is, that sin is only an abuse of the powers of nature. Men have very extensively overlooked the fact, that a deep-seated, but voluntary preference for sin, was the foundation and fountain and cause of all other sins. The only sense in which sin is natural to men is, that it is natural for mind to be influenced in its individual exercises by a supreme preference or choice of any object. It will, therefore, always be natural for a sinner to sin, until he changes the supreme preference of his mind, and prefers the glory of God and the interests of his kingdom to his own separate and opposing interests.

4th. Here you can see what a change of heart is. Its nature, its necessity, and the obligation of the sinner immediately to change it. You can see also that the first act which the sinner will, or can perform, that can be acceptable to God, must be to change his heart, or the supreme controlling preference of his mind.

5th. Perhaps some one will object and say, if infants are not born with a sinful nature, how then are they saved by grace? But I ask in return, if they are born with a sinful nature, how are they saved by grace? Does God create an infant a sinner, and then call it grace to save him from the sinfulness of a nature of his own creation? Absurd and blasphemous. What! represent the ever-blessed God as either directly creating a sinful nature, or as establishing such an order of things that a nature in itself sinful would by physical necessity descend from Adam, and then call that grace by which the infant is saved! (not from its conduct, but from its nature!)

But let us look at this. Here are two systems; the one maintains that infants have no moral character at all, until they have committed actual transgression. That their first moral actions are invariably sinful, but that previous to moral action they are neither sinful nor holy. That, as they have no moral character, they deserve neither praise nor blame; neither life nor death at the hand of God. God might annihilate them without injustice, or he may bestow upon them eternal life as a free and unearned gift.

The other system maintains that infants have a sinful nature which they have inherited from Adam. The Scriptures maintain that all who are ever saved of the human family, must be saved by grace; and those who maintain the system that the nature of infants is itself sinful, suppose that upon their system alone is it possible to ascribe the salvation of infants, who die before actual transgression to grace. But let us for a few moments examine these systems. Grace is evidently used in different senses in the Bible.

It is sometimes synonymous with holiness. To grow in grace, is to grow in holiness. Its most common import seems to be that of unmerited favour. It is sometimes used in a wider sense, and includes the idea of mercy or forgiveness. Now, when infants die previous to actual transgression, it is impossible to ascribe their salvation to grace, in any other sense than that of undeserved or unearned favour. If they have never sinned, it is impossible that they should be saved by grace, if we include in the term grace, the idea of mercy or forgiveness.

To assert that a child can be pardoned for having a sinful nature, is to talk ridiculous nonsense: and it is only in the sense of undeserved favour, excluding the idea of mercy or pardon, that an infant, dying before actual transgression, can be said to be saved by grace. In this sense, his salvation is by grace. He has never earned eternal life; he has never done anything, by which he has laid God under any obligation to save him, and God might without any injustice annihilate him.

But if it please him for the sake of Christ, as I fully believe it does, to confer eternal life upon one whom he might without any injustice annihilate, it is conferring upon him infinite favour. But let us look at the other system for a moment. This denies that infants have a sinful nature, and rejects the monstrous dogma that

God has created the nature sinful, and then pretends to save the infant from a nature of his own creation by grace, as if the infant deserved damnation for being what God made it.

Those that hold this scheme insist that there is as much grace in the salvation of infants, upon their view of the subject, as upon the impossible dogma of a sinful nature. The fact is, that the very existence of the whole race of man, is a mere matter of grace; having reference to the atonement of Jesus Christ. Had it not been for the contemplated atonement, Adam and Eve would have been sent to hell at once, and never have had any posterity. The race could never have existed.

There never could have been any infants, or adults (Adam and Eve excepted,) had it not been for the grace of Christ in interposing in behalf of man by his atonement. It was doubtless in anticipation of this, and on account of it, that Adam and Eve were spared and the sentence of the law not instantly executed upon them. Now every infant owes its very existence to the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and if it dies previous to actual transgression, it is just as absolutely indebted to Christ for eternal life, as if it had been the greatest sinner on earth.

On neither of these schemes, does the grace which saves infants include the idea of pardon--but on both of them they are saved by grace, inasmuch as they owe their very existence to the atonement of Christ; and in both cases are delivered from circumstances under which it is certain had they lived to form a moral character, they would have sinned, and deserved eternal death. To think, therefore, of objecting to the view of depravity that I have given in these discourses, that it denies the grace of God in the salvation of infants, is either to misconceive, or willfully to misrepresent the sentiments that I have advocated.

I desire to ask, and I wish that it may be answered, if it can be; wherein there is any more grace displayed in the salvation of infants, upon the one system than upon the other. Will it be said that if the nature of infants is sinful, grace must change their nature, and that there is this difference, that although in neither case does the infant need a pardon, yet in the one case his nature needs to be changed, and not in the other? But if his nature needs to be changed. I deny that this is an act of grace; if God has made his nature wrong and incapable of performing any but sinful actions, he is bound to change it.

It is consummate trifling to call this grace--to cause a being to come into existence with a sinful or defective nature and then call it grace to alter this nature and make it as it should have been at first, is to trifle with serious things and talk deceitfully for God.

6th. Again. The hatred of sinners is cruel. It is as God says, "rendering hatred for his love." He is love, and this is the reason and the only reason why they hate him. Mark, it is not because they overlook the fact that he is infinitely benevolent. It is not merely in the face of this fact, that for other reasons they hate him; but it is because of this fact. It is literally and absolutely rendering hatred for his love. He is opposed to their injuring each other. He desires their happiness and is infinitely opposed to their making themselves miserable. He is infinitely more opposed to their doing any thing that will prove injurious to themselves, than ever an earthly parent was to that course of conduct in his beloved child, which he foresaw would ruin him. His heart yearns with infinitely more than parental tenderness. He expostulates with sinners and says, "O do not that abominable thing that I hate." "How shall I give thee up Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? My heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled together."

He feels all the gushings of a father's tenderness, and all the opposition of a father to any course that will injure his offspring, and as children will sometimes hate, and revile their parents for opposing their

wayward courses to destruction, so sinners hate God, more than they hate all other beings, because he is infinitely more opposed to their destroying their own souls.

7th. The better God is, the more sinners hate him.

The better he is, the more he is opposed to their selfishness; and the more he opposes their selfishness, while they remain selfish, the more they are provoked with him.

In my second discourse on depravity, I showed that men hate God supremely. The only reason is because his excellence is supreme excellence. His goodness is unmingled goodness, and therefore their hatred is unmingled enmity. If there were any defect in his character, men would not hate him so much. If God were not perfectly, yea, infinitely good, men might not be totally depraved, I mean they might not be totally opposed to his character; but because his character has no blemish, therefore they sincerely, cordially, and perfectly hate him.

8th. Again. The more he tries to do them good, while they remain impenitent, the more they will hate him.

While they retain their selfishness, all his efforts to restrain it, to hedge them in, to prevent the accomplishment of their selfish desires; the more he interposes to tear away their idols, to wean them from the world, the more he embitters every cup of joy with which they attempt to satisfy themselves, the more means he uses to reclaim, and sanctify and save; if their selfishness remain unbroken, the more deeply and eternally will they hate him.

9th. This conduct in sinners is infinitely blameworthy, and deserves eternal death.

It is impossible to conceive of guilt more deep and damning than that of sinners under the Gospel. They sin under circumstances so peculiar, that their guilt is more aggravated than that of devils. Devils have broken the law, and so have you, sinners. But devils never rejected the Gospel. They have been guilty of rebellion, and so have you. But they have never rejected the offer of pardon, and spurned, as with their feet, the offer of eternal life through the atoning blood of the Son of God. If you, sinners, do not deserve eternal death, I cannot conceive that there is a devil in hell that deserves it. And yet, strange to tell, sinners often speak as if it were doubtful whether they deserve to be damned.

10th. It is easy to see from this subject, that saints and angels will be entirely satisfied with the justice of God in the damnation of sinners. They will never take delight in the misery of the damned, but in the display of justice, in the vindication of his insulted majesty and injured honour, in the respect which punishment will create for the law and character of God, they will have pleasure; they will see that the display of his justice is glorious, and will cry halleluia, while "the smoke of their torment shall ascend up forever and ever."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/why-sinners-hate-god/>

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