

Articles and Sermons :: Does God Love the Sinner and Hate Only His Sin? (Gerstner)

Does God Love the Sinner and Hate Only His Sin? (Gerstner), on: 2007/9/14 1:14

Does God Love the Sinner and Hate Only His Sin?

Dr. John H. Gerstner

“Repent or Perish” forces people to ponder seriously the popular slogan, “God hates the sin and loves the sinner.” Is a necessary repentance consistent with “God loves the sinner?” If God loves the sinner while he is alive, it is strange that God sends him to hell as soon as he dies. God loves the sinner to death? Loves him to everlasting torment?

There is something wrong here. Either God loves the sinner and will not send him into the furnace of His eternal wrath; or He sends him into His eternal wrath and does not love him. Either “you are going to hell unless” because God hates you, as you are. Or, God loves you and “you are going to hell unless” is false.

What leads almost everyone to believe that God loves the sinner is that God does the sinner so much good. He bestows so many favors including letting him continue to live. How can God let the sinner live and give him so many blessings, unless He loves him? There is a kind of love between God and sinners. We call it the “love of benevolence.” That means the love of good will. Benevolens — willing well. Doing well. God can do well to the sinner without loving him with the other kind of love. “Complacent love,” a pleasure in, affection for, admiration of. It exists in perfection between the Father and the Son, “in whom I am well pleased” (Matt.3:17; Mk.1:11).

God is perfectly displeased with the sinner. The sinner hates God, disobeys God, is ungrateful to God for all His favors, would kill God if he could. He is dead in trespasses and sins. (Eph.2:1) “The thoughts and intents of his heart are only evil continually.” (Gen.6:5) He is the slave of sin (John 8:34), the servant of the devil, (Eph.2:2).

God has no complacent love for the sinner at all. He has a perfect hatred of him, “I hate them with a perfect hatred.” (Ps. 139:22)

Why does God do so much good for those He perfectly hates and as soon as they die impenitent send them immediately to hell and never in all eternity does them one solitary favor more? It is to show His willingness to forgive the sinner if only he will repent. It shows the sincerity of God’s willingness to pardon the greatest sinner that, even while He hates him with a perfect hatred, He showers him with constant daily blessings.

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, there is no “problem of pain.” The only problem is the “problem of pleasure.” Dreadful as it is, it is not surprising that God sends sinners to hell. The problem is why He does not do it sooner. Why does God let a hell-deserving sinner live a minute and then let him prosper like the green bay tree (Ps.37:35), as well? It is obvious that God can destroy the ungrateful. Why doesn’t He? That is the problem.

Yes, the sinner suffers, too. But so little. It is a gentle reminder: though the sinner receives many divine favors, that does not mean that God is pleased with him. It is in spite of the fact that God hates him with a perfect hatred.

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness
and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the
kindness of God leads you to repentance? (Rom.2:4)

Our text also shows that the one reason a sinner is permitted to be born into and enjoy this world rather than wake up as an infant in hell is that God, with His love of benevolence, is determined to give the sinner a “chance,” an opportunity to repent. Alas, most sinners use it as a chance to sin! They make God’s blessed love of benevolence into a curse.

In this world the sinner enjoys nothing but the benevolent love of God. Every experience of pain as well as pleasure is from God’s love — of benevolence. Even pain is from love because it tends to wake the sinner to his danger. God indeed loves the sinner, whom He hates with a perfect hatred, with a perfect love of benevolence.

The sinner, as I said, makes every divine blessing into a curse including God's love of benevolence. This he does by construing a love of benevolence as a love of complacency.

Construing God's love of benevolence as a love of complacency is fatal. Instead of the divine forbearance leading to repentance, it is used as an excuse for non-repentance. Thus the sinner is not saved but damned by God's love of benevolence.

God "loves" the sinner benevolently and hates the sinner displacently. If the sinner dies impenitent, God removes His love of benevolence and pours out the full wrath of his displacent love.

As far as "hatred of sins" is concerned, sins do not exist apart from the sinner. God does hate sinning, killing, stealing, lying, lusting, etc., but this alludes to the perpetrator of these crimes.

God never hates the redeemed even when they sin. Is He an unfair respecter of persons? No! (Act. 10:34) God hates the unredeemed sinner but loves the redeemed even when they sin for a good and just reason. God loves the redeemed even when they sin because His Son, in whom God is always well-pleased, ever lives to make intercession for them. (Rom. 8:27, 34) Christ died to atone for the guilt of His people's sins. When they sin, these are atoned-for sins. They are sins with their guilt removed. In one sense, they are not sins at all. God does not hate His people when they sin because they are in His Son, Christ Jesus. And they are made acceptable in His Son. He "has made us accepted in the Beloved." (Eph. 1:6)

Divine nepotism? No, His Son died for these people and paid the price for their sins past, present, and future. They are cancelled before they are committed. That is truth, not fiction. Righteousness, not nepotistic favoritism. In fact, it is not their original relationship to Christ which makes their sins guiltless, but Christ's making satisfaction for their sins that created the relationship as children adopted into the family of God.

God, in hot displeasure, chastens His people when they sin (Ps. 6: 1; 38:1). It is not hatred but complacent love in Christ Jesus. "Whom the Lord loves He chastens." (Heb. 12:6,7) God loves His people even when He afflicts them and hates the impenitent even when He befriends them.

Why the chastening when there is love? God blessed the wicked when there was holy hatred. Now He chastens His people when there is holy love. This is because true moral behavior must be perfected. No sin can be tolerated in those for whom Christ died. He died to purchase a "peculiar people zealous of good works." (Titus 2:14) Being redeemed, so far from tolerating their sinning, precludes it. Anyone who persists in sinning proves thereby that he is not a child of God. God punishes His own especially because they are His children. "You only have I chosen among all the families of the earth: Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." (Amos 3:2)

"Upright" man was promised and warned. A holy, just, and perfect God would promise and warn. Eternal life — if obedient. Instant death — the moment of disobedience. (Gen. 3:5; Ecc. 7:29)

When man sinned, he died spiritually and was rejected from communion with God his maker and friend. (Gen. 3; Rom. 5: 12ff) The wrath of God was upon him; labor was his lot; suffering in childbirth; alienation and death, as threatened. God is holy; of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. (Hab. 1:13)

Yet mortal man "lived" on (though to live in pleasure is death, 1 Tim. 5:6), and so did promise. When the angels sinned they perished without delay, without promise, without hope.

Man's fate was better and worse than the fallen angels' lot. It was a day of possible salvation but also of possible greater damnation, greater damnation for sinning away the day of possible salvation. God in His wrath; God in His mercy; at the same time.

This was a terrible but holy wrath. God was using His omnipotent power but according to His perfect justice. Man was affected but he deserved it. It was no more, no less, than he deserved. God is no more powerful than holy; no more holy than powerful.

As man continued to sin, God continued to increase His fury. His wrath is in no hurry. The record is kept, all accounts receivable. Every idle word will be brought into judgment (Matt. 12:36). The cup of iniquity must be filled. Then wrath to the

uttermost. (1 Thess. 2:16) God's glory shines in the perfection of His work.

But God— God decreed the sin, (Prov. 16:4). Yes, for good and for glory. Man did it for evil and for shame.

A little sin and infinite wrath? A little sin against an infinite God is infinite. Wrath is in perfect proportion to the guilt. But even if the punishment were finite it would go on "infinitely," unendingly, because the sinner continues to sin in resenting it.

All glory to God for His holy anger. (John 17:3; Rom.9: 17f)

Author

Dr. John H. Gerstner was born in Tampa, Florida, and raised in Pennsylvania. He earned his Ph.D. from Harvard University. Dr. Gerstner pastored several churches before accepting a professorship at Pittsburgh-Xenia Theological Seminary, where he taught church history for over 30 years. He served as a visiting professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and adjunct professor at Knox Theological Seminary in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Dr. Gerstner was also professor-at-large for Ligonier Ministries for many years, and recorded numerous lectures on audio and video for that organization.

Dr. Gerstner was a stalwart champion of the cause of reformed theology and, in particular, the teachings of Jonathan Edwards. He was called home to be with the Lord in March 1996.

Re: Does God Love the Sinner and Hate Only His Sin? (Gerstner) - posted by enid, on: 2007/9/14 1:43

I just wanted to point something out that I noticed in reading this article.

Dr Gerstner quoted part of Psalm 139v22, 'I hate them with perfect hatred...

In this he was saying that God hates the sinner.

If we start at verse 21 of the same chapter it reads this way:

'Do I not hate them, O Lord, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?

Then we get to verse 22 which reads, in full, 'I hate them with perfect hatred, I count them my enemies'

This Psalm is attributed to David. He is the one saying he hates God's enemies, not God saying He hates the sinner with perfect hatred.

Still, I don't doubt you will get many comments, yet again, on this one.

God bless.

Re: Does God Love the Sinner and Hate Only His Sin? (Gerstner) - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2007/9/14 2:07

God hates sinners with a fiery red hatred, And yet at the same time Loves them with such a love he sent his only begotten son to be slaughtered upon a tree.

He hates sinners because it is the sinner that goes to hell not the sin, He loves us because while we yet were sinners he died for us, so for anyone who believes and repents and receives him will be saved

What Love! and yet he wouldn't be love if he did not hate sin and sinners in all its forms...

And it's always good to remember God's hate is not like our for the most time sinful-hatred... God's hate is good and Holy thing.

just my thoughts

Re: - posted by awakenwithin (), on: 2007/9/14 23:39

what good truth to read and think on..
Come let learn the hard things of God

In His love
charlene