

## **DOES GOD HATE SIN OR THE SINNER?**

By

Professor Walter A. Albrecht  
Concordia Theological Seminary  
Springfield, Illinois

A paper delivered to the Springfield Circuit Pastors and Professors Conference April 20, 1953.

"If it is true that God hates the sinner, how is this truth to be presented in sermons without doing harm?"

The wording of the question casts doubt on a divine truth and assumes that harm can be done by preaching the truth. While unworthy of a Christian, it no doubt proceeds from a troubled heart. Let's answer it therefore, and divide it into two questions: Does Scripture teach that God hates the sinner? And how is this truth to be preached?

### **I. DOES SCRIPTURE TEACH THAT GOD HATES THE SINNER?**

**Hatred**, the dictionary defines as "bitter dislike or aversion; antipathy; animosity; enmity." It "implies extreme aversion, especially as coupled with enmity or malice." Dislike is repugnance. Aversion is mental opposition. Antipathy is an instinctive feeling of aversion or dislike. Animosity is active and vehement enmity; ill will. Enmity is hostility or the state of being an enemy. Synonyms of hatred are: "Abhorrence, anger, animosity, antipathy, malevolence, malice, rancor, repugnance, resentment, revenge, spite," and the like. That would be charging Him with evil. We do not mean to say that His hatred is "coupled with malice." When the dictionary defines, "Hate or hatred, as applied to persons, as intense and continued aversion, usually with disposition to injure," this "usually with disposition to injure" does not fit God. "**Anger** is sudden and brief, **hatred** is lingering and enduring," continues the dictionary.

Now our question reads: Does God have a bitter dislike and strong aversion for the sinner? Is He the enemy of the sinner? Has He an enduring antipathy against sinners? Does He detest sinners?

Looking into Scriptures, we find these statements: "You are not a God that has pleasure in wickedness.....You hate (sane) all workers of iniquity. You shall destroy them that speak lies; the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man," Psalm 5:5-6. "These six things the Lord hates (sane): (6) A false witness that speaks lies," Prov. 6:16,19. "I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you," Lev. 26:30. Moses, pleading for idolatrous Israel,

declares: "I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure, wherewith the Lord was angry against you to destroy you," Deut. 9:19. David, in Ps. 78:59, reminds the children of Israel of his day: "When God heard this (idolatry), He was angry, and greatly abhorred Israel." And in Ps. 89:38: "You have cast off and abhorred, You have been angry with Your anointed." Prov. 22:14: "The mouth of strange women is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the Lord shall fall therein."

And in turning to the New Testament, we find John the Baptist preaching: "O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Matt. 3:7. Christ prophesied of the last days of Jerusalem and the world: "For there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people," Luke 21:23. In the presence of the centurion of Capernaum Jesus prophesied: "But the children of this kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness," Matt. 8:12. "And when the Son of Man shall come in His glory and all nations be gathered before Him, then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels,'" Matt. 25:41

In Rom. 1:30 the RV has correctly changed the translation from "haters of God" to "hateful to God," for that is what **theostuges** means. And when Paul in Rom. 5:10 says, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life," the words "when we were enemies," **echthroi ontes**, express not our enmity for God, but God's enmity toward us. In Eph. 2:3 Paul says: "And were by nature the children of wrath." As we came into the world, before ever we had committed a sin in desires, thoughts, words and deeds, we were hated, detested, abhorred by God. In 2 Cor. 16:22 Paul pronounced the curse of God on all who reject Christ: "If any man does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be cursed. (Anathema. Maran-atha)"

But this is also Paul's sentiment. He hates the despiser of Christ. Even as he says in Rom. 11:28 of the Jews: "As concerning the Gospel, they are enemies for your sakes; but as touching the election, they are beloved for your fathers' sakes." And so David echoes the feelings of his divine Lord, when he says, Ps. 139:21-22: "Do I not hate them, O Lord, that hate You? And am I not grieved with those that rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies."

That Luther's translation of Ps. 101:3 ("**Ich hasse den Uebertreter und lasse ihn nicht bei mir bleiben**") is better than the Authorized "I hate the work of them that turn aside," is evident from the context even in the Authorized: "A perverse heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person.... He that works deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that tells lies shall not tarry in my sight. I will destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord." The Latin renders it: "**Facientes praevaricationes odivi.**" The Greek: "**poiontes parabaseis emisesa.**" Everyone is

familiar with the imprecatory Psalms of David, 59, 69, 109, where he calls down the wrath of God upon his enemies.

Is this Missouri teaching? Dr. F. Pieper says, Dogmatics II, p. 345: "Rom. 5:10: All men are **echthroi**, hated by God, under His wrath." And in a footnote he quotes Luthardt as saying: "**echthroi ontes** does not have the active sense (as. e.g., Beck and Ritschl hold), but the passive sense: whose enemy God was, who lay under God's wrath."

Vol. II, p. 346 Pieper says: "Rom. 5:10: 'When we were enemies (**echthroi**, passive: **Deo invis**), we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.' Luthardt: 'A change of attitude on the part of God is meant.'"

Again, Vol. II, p. 348: "The **katalassein** (reconcile) of Rom 5:10 and 2 Cor. 5:14 does not refer – let this fact be noted – to any change that occurs in men, but describes an occurrence in the heart of God. It was God who laid His anger by on account of the ransom brought by Christ." And in a footnote Pieper quotes Meyer, who says: "Mankind was on account of its uncanceled sins under God's holy wrath, **echthroi Theou**, Rom. 5:10, **Deo invis**, the object of God's hatred; but with the cancellation of their sins, effected by the death of Christ, God's wrath came to an end. The reconciliation of all mankind took place objectively through the death of Christ."

Again, Vol. II, p. 352: "They object that it is a disparagement of the Divine Being to predicate of Him anger, wrath, enmity, as if nothing less than Christ's substitutional suffering and death could reconcile Him to man. (Footnote: This criticism is advanced not only by the Socinians, the coarse rationalists, Ritschl, etc., but also by many contemporaneous sectarian preachers. The soft generation of our day must be spared the stern preaching of the wrath of God against sinful mankind.)

Only Scripture can tell us what conceptions of God are worthy or unworthy of Him, and Scripture tells us that according to His righteousness God is very angry with sinful men. Rom. 1:18: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Gal. 3:10: "Cursed is everyone that does not continue in all things which are written in the Book of the Law to do them." Rom. 5:10: "When we were enemies," **echthroi ontes**. This testimony of Scripture is corroborated by the voice of conscience, which finds no surcease (adjunct), in the philosophical speculations about the impossibility, unreasonableness, etc., of God's wrath. But the wrath of God struck Christ in our stead, and expending itself on Him, it is changed into grace. Gal. 3:13: "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us." (Footnote: Mayer on Rom. 5:10 (**echthroi**): "It is not to be taken in the active sense – we were God's enemies – for the death of Christ did not wipe out the enmity of men against God, but only the passive interpretation is correct: enemies of God, such against whom the holy **orge** of God was

directed on account of sin: **theostugeis** (hated by God), Rom. 1:30; children of wrath, Eph. 2:3.”)

Pieper Vol. II, p. 353: “According to Scripture, Christ’s death reveals both God’s love and God’s wrath. This truth is brought out in this very passage, Rom. 5:8-11: ‘Hated by God (**Deo invis**, lying under God’s wrath), we were reconciled to God.’” Footnote: “This is Meyer’s correct explanation of this passage. Also Luthardt: “With whom God was angry, who were under the **orge** of God – in spite of the **agape** – **katelagemen** – **katalagentes**, passive. “**Den Zorn laesst er wohl fahren**” (“But lays His anger by”).” Pieper II, p. 406f: “We were reconciled with God while we were still objects of His wrath (“when we were enemies” v. 10, God being our enemy).”

Dr. George Stoeckhardt comments on Rom. 5:10: “In our passage, too, it is brought out that this blessing of Christ began during the opposing state of mankind. While we were yet enemies, while we had God against us, without this inimical relation being reduced or mitigated in any way, this great, wonderful change occurred, God’s Son took our place, shouldered the wrath and enmity, suffered the wrath in His passion and death, and thus converted our hostile relation to God into a relation of friendship, and procured for us God’s favor and affection.” p. 229.

On Rom. 1:30, **theostugeis**, Stoeckhardt remarks: “Such arrogance (over against the fellowman) is an especial abomination to God. Therefore, the Apostle inserts the thought here that people of this caliber are hated of God. For **theostugeis**, which only the passive meaning (hated) and cannot mean **osores Dei** (haters of God), does not fit for an independent place in this list of sins and must therefore be combined with the expressions following as their attribute.” p. 66.

Stoeckhardt in his Commentary on Romans shows that Paul in Rom. 5:6-9 sets forth the unspeakably great love, which God has shown us, namely, that Christ died for us. For whom did He die? “Christ died for the ungodly,” v. 6, Not for the righteous, not for the good people, v. 7. He died for “us while we were yet sinners,” v. 8. Through Christ’s death and blood we, all men, are justified, v. 9. And if we have been justified, “we shall be saved from wrath (RV: the wrath of God) through Him,” v. 9.

If the greater thing has come to pass, the lesser will “much more” take place. The change which made justified people of the ungodly is greater than the change in the translation of the righteous into eternal bliss. Through Christ we shall escape the wrath of the Last Day. This conclusion Paul repeats in v. 10, the verse we are interested in. Here the Apostle says: If we were reconciled to God the death of His Son while we were enemies, not righteous men, not good men, but ungodly, sinners, people whom God abhorred, much more will the living and exalted Christ save us into His life, eternal life.

Of *echthroi* Stoeckhardt says (p. 228): “Baur, Beck, Ritschl take *echthroi* in the active sense of haters of God, and *katelagemen, katalagentes* (reconciled) in the subjective sense of a change of attitude in man brought about through Christ’s death, through God’s love, an amicable disposition of man toward God, ‘But this interpretation,’ Weiss correctly notes, ‘would contradict the whole context, which does not speak of a change of mind toward God on the part of man, but speaks (of God’s act) of justification and its consequences, and this opinion would supply an entirely different motive for the “much more” in v. 10 than in v. 9, where the conclusion as to what favor can be expected in the future rests not on a greater worthiness of man, but on a greater evidence of God’s love.’” p. 228.

Of Eph. 2:3 Stoeckhardt says: “All men are by nature and birth, before they have committed any sin, subject to God’s wrath. Paul clearly and definitely teaches, just as the other writers of Holy Writ, that original sin is *peccatum vere damnans*.... Even though our reason hesitates and refuses to acknowledge that this original ruin is truly sin which includes guilt and thus subjects to the wrath of God, nevertheless we also in this case simply follow the teaching of Scripture which describes and pictures man as he is by nature, after the Fall, as a perfectly corrupt and detestable creature, the child of disobedience, of death, or wrath, and of eternal damnation, and in this way present in a much brighter light the mercy of God toward this fallen man.” Commentary on Ephesians, Sommer Translation, p. 123.

Dr. Th. Engelder says in Scripture Cannot Be Broken, p. 240: “The offense which men take at the so-called imprecatory psalms is due to two defects in the moral sense. They are, in the first place, deficient in the sense of the enormity and hatefulness of sin, of the rebellion against God, of false doctrine. They refuse to let God’s wrath against the evil-doer make its full impression on their ethico-Christian consciousness...And, secondly, their moral sense lacks too much of the fear of God. They tell us that it would be unseemly if God had inspired the imprecatory psalms...Because we believe in Verbal Inspiration, we know that those sentiments express the mind of God; and while some of the expressions may seem too harsh to us, we bridle our thoughts. We know that, while now we see only through a glass darkly, the light of glory will reveal to us that every word of the imprecatory psalms is in full accord with the eternal Holiness.”

Prof. H. Hamann of Australia quotes from McClintock and Strong’s Cyclopedia, VIII, p. 755: “The truth is that only a morbid benevolence, a mistaken philanthropy, takes offense at these psalms; for in reality they are not opposed to the spirit of the Gospel nor to the love of enemies which Christ enjoined. Resentment against evil-doers is so far from sinful, that we find it exemplified in the meek and spotless Redeemer Himself, Mark 3:5.” Quoted by Engelder p. 240.

Who is it that teaches that there is no wrath and hatred of the sinner in God? Abelard (d. 1142) taught that the Son of God came into the world not to satisfy the justice of God, but to

give us, by His teaching and example, particularly by His death, the supreme proof of God's love and thus to awaken in us love for God, and that by exercising this love for God we are reconciled and justified. To say that God was reconciled by the blood of the innocent Christ would be "cruel and unjust." The Socinians and Unitarians hold a similar view. Ritschl, Ad. Harnack, von Hoffmann also teach it. Ritschl's "declaratory theory" teaches that there is no wrath in God an account of sin, but that God declares His love for man through Christ. The purpose of Christ's life and suffering was not to render vicarious satisfaction to God's justice, but to convince men that they need not fear God because of their sins. Once men are convinced of this, their reconciliation is accomplished. The sense of guilt is an illusion which it is the part of Christ to dispel. This leaves as the essence of Christianity, human morality induced by Christ's teaching.

This Rischlian idea of a God without wrath who is all love has permeated not only sectarian circles here in the United States. In the Lutheran Standard of the ALC of Feb. 21, 1953, we are told that the imprecatory psalms are "out of line with the spirit of Christ." We quote: "The believers of the Old Testament had only a limited revelation of God.... This also made for a limited morality, both in terms of knowledge and of motivation.... Further, it is often characteristic of the Old Testament to identify evil with the person who committed it. In the New Testament a sharp distinction is made between sin and the sinner. The New Testament, too, hates and damns sin. But it distinguishes it from the sinner, and it loves and seeks to redeem that sinner.... To us, children of the New Testament, they (these imprecatory prayers) must remain foreign in spirit. Here, Jesus is our pattern." What a lack of Christian knowledge!

It is evident, then, that Scripture teaches a hatred of God, not only for sin, but also for the sinner.

## **II. HOW SHOULD THIS TRUTH BE PREACHED?**

A) Since it is Scripture truth, it is to be preached. We are to teach men all things whatsoever Christ has commanded. We are to instruct men in the whole counsel of God. Whoever subtracts from what God has revealed in Scripture is as guilty as the teacher who adds to God's Word. To His warning, "Therefore you also be ready," in His description of the last times, the Lord immediately adds the question: "who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord has made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season." Matthew 25:45.

B) This truth of God's hate for the transgressor is to be preached clearly. Our preaching of this truth must fit the declaration of God: "The Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart," Heb. 4:12. But, you counter; it denies the love of God. It does. And it should. Remember, Law

and Gospel are *plusquam contradictoria*, more than contradictory. God's hatred, wrath, curse of the sinner is Law. Its purpose is to arouse in the sinner a lively consciousness of his doom. The conviction

that God is his enemy, is after him, is angry beyond description or comprehension, will visit upon him his every iniquity, will punish even man's corrupt condition which he did not himself produce, with excruciating pains of body and soul forevermore, - this conviction must seize man until he trembles in terrors of conscience and in self-despair cries out: "Men and Brethren, what shall we do?" Acts 2:37.

If we do not so preach the divine Law, if we dull its cutting edge, its penetrating point, by mixing in here the love of God, we are unfaithful shepherds, burying our pound in the ground and gaining nothing for Christ. As long as man stands in the shadow of the Law – as everyone does by nature – and remains ignorant of God's true relation to him as the Giver of that Law, he will refuse to step into the sunlight of the Gospel, he will not learn how to blot out the handwriting of condemnation in his conscience with the handwriting of justification by the blood of the Crucified One, he will not discover how properly to separate Law and Gospel, but will inevitably combine Law and Gospel and make of God a shrew, an idol, who scolds a lot, but means little of it, who executes little of what He threatens, but is swayed by a sickly sentimentality. But such a belief is no saving faith; it is a man-made faith without power to save. Brethren, let your preaching of the Law be sharp and clear.

C) The truth of God's consuming hatred of the sinner should be preached boldly. Will it do harm? What a question for a Christian teacher to ask! God's truth can do no harm. "My Word shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the matter for which I sent it." Isaiah 55:11. But won't it frighten people away from the Church? You are indeed commissioned to preach the Gospel to all the world. But where does God promise that you will convert all the world? On the contrary, Scripture teaches that only God's elect will be saved. Even among believers there are casualties. Some are time-believers. And if any man comes to faith and remains in faith unto the end, it is God's doing. We contribute nothing to it. We can only wreck God's plan of saving by shortchanging people in handing out Law or Gospel. But if we are faithful to God's instructions, if we boldly teach Law and Gospel in their purity, His divine end will be fully accomplished and all His elect will be saved. We are not called to build up a mighty visible organization, to work for a united impressive front, but to build the invisible kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ according to His specifications.

D) The preaching of God's hate of the sinner must be followed by the preaching of God's love for the same sinner. (See Pieper II, p. 352). In other words, the preaching of the Law must be succeeded by the preaching of the Gospel. Our Great Commission and chief office is the preaching of the Gospel. And the Law is to be overcome by the Gospel. "Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone that believes." Rom. 10:4. Luther: "Both are God's Word, the Law and the Gospel, but the two are not equal. One is lower, the other

higher; one is weaker, the other stronger; one is lesser, the other greater. When now they wrestle with each other, I follow the Gospel and say, Good-by Law!" Pieper: "It is therefore a part of the proper distinction between Law and Gospel that the Gospel be recognized as the "higher Word," which is to be God's final Word for the terrified sinner." Vol. III, p. 232. As Paul says: "Moreover, the Law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin has reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord," Rom. 5:20-21.