

# God Under Obligation to Do Right

by Charles Finney

---

*God is under a moral obligation to do right, and all moral beings are bound to be willing that He should do right, as this is essential to happiness and therefore indispensable to salvation.*

**Scripture:** Genesis 18:25, Psalm 89:14, Isaiah 30:18, Romans 2:6

**Topics:** "God's Justice", "Moral Obligation"

---

## Description

Charles Finney emphasizes that God is morally obligated to do right, as He embodies disinterested benevolence, which is the highest good for all beings. He explains that God's nature requires Him to establish moral governance and act in accordance with the law of benevolence, which is essential for His moral character. Finney argues that all moral beings must be willing for God to do right, as this willingness is crucial for salvation and true virtue. He asserts that any reluctance to accept God's actions as right reflects a rebellion against His moral authority. Ultimately, Finney reassures that the Judge of all the earth will always do right, providing comfort and hope to believers.

---

## Transcript

'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' Gen. 18:25.

In discussing this subject I will show,

I. WHAT IS RIGHT.

II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN GOD'S DOING RIGHT?

III. THAT GOD IS UNDER A MORAL OBLIGATION TO DO RIGHT.

IV. THAT ALL MORAL BEINGS ARE BOUND TO BE WILLING THAT GOD SHOULD DO RIGHT.

V. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN BEING WILLING THAT GOD SHOULD DO RIGHT.

VI. THAT THIS STATE OF MIND IS INDISPENSABLE TO SALVATION.

I. What is right?

Right expresses the moral quality of disinterested benevolence. Benevolence is good willing or willing the highest good of being. Disinterested benevolence is willing the good of being as an end, or for its own

sake, or, in other words, on account of its intrinsic value. A thing is good, that is, naturally good, because it is valuable in itself.--Such, for instance, is happiness. Happiness is a good in itself, that is, it is valuable. Every moral being knows by his own certain knowledge, that happiness is valuable, is good. To will, therefore, the highest happiness or the highest good of being for its own sake, is benevolence. Benevolence, then, consists in willing according to the nature and relations of things. Reason universally affirms that to will thus, to will good for its own sake, to will it impartially or disinterestedly, or in other words, to will every good of every being according to its relative value, is right. Right is the term by which we express the moral quality of disinterested benevolence. The terms right, virtue, holiness, &c., express the same thing. They denote the moral quality of disinterested benevolence or of that love that constitutes obedience to the law of God. Let it be understood, then, that disinterested benevolence is always right, and that nothing else is right, and that whatever is right or virtuous, is only a modification of disinterested benevolence. Nothing is virtue or right that is not in compliance with the law of disinterested benevolence.

## II. What is implied in God's doing right?

Doing right in God, his nature and relations being what they are, must imply the doing of several things by Him that would not be implied in the case of any other being.

1. He is naturally able to do many things that no other being can do. For example: God alone possesses creative power. Benevolence in Him, therefore, implies not merely willing the good of beings already existing, but that He give existence to as many beings as He wisely can. The law of benevolence would certainly require of Him to exert his infinite attributes in the promotion of good. If He did not do so, his own conscience would condemn Him.

2. His nature and relations are such that benevolence in Him requires the establishment and due administration of moral government. He has created a universe of moral beings. The highest good of the universe demands that a moral government should exist. God is able to establish and administer a moral government. Doing right, therefore, in God implies the establishment and administration of a moral government over the universe.

The same is true of many other things which it is unnecessary to mention.

## III. God is under a moral obligation to do right.

1. The scriptures represent God as a moral being.

2. If He is a moral being, He must be the subject of moral obligation.

3. If He were not under a moral obligation to do right, benevolence in Him would be no virtue. Indeed there could be to Him no such thing as right and wrong, unless He were under a moral obligation to do right. Doing right in any being consists in complying with moral obligation. Right, virtue, holiness, &c., in any being, always implies moral obligation, for they are nothing else than a compliance with moral obligation. If God were not under a moral obligation, He could have no moral character. He could be neither praise nor blame-worthy. Nothing would be virtue nor praise-worthy in Him unless it sustained a relation to moral obligation.

4. Nothing could be wise or virtuous in God that is not demanded by the law of benevolence. If God should do any thing that was not required by the law of benevolence, it would be neither wise nor virtuous. If the creation of the universe were not required by the law of benevolence, then the act of creation was not

virtuous. But it is impossible that the universe should not have been created in compliance with the law of benevolence. The evidences of a benevolent intention on the part of the Creator are so manifold in all the works of God as to render it certain that it was created in obedience to the law of benevolence, in other words, that the creation of the universe was an expression and a carrying out of the disposition of God to do good.

It is not intended that God was under an obligation to any one above Himself, for no such being existed. But his own self-existent nature is such that He is his own law-giver, and imposes obligation on Himself. His own reason eternally and intuitively affirms that He ought to be benevolent, that He ought to wield his own infinite attributes in the creation of beings and the promotion of their good. He is therefore under law to Himself, his reason and conscience always imposing moral obligation upon Himself. Compliance with this obligation in Him is virtue. A refusal would be vice.

5. In the text, Abraham assumes that God is under moral obligation to do right. God had informed Abraham that He was about to destroy Sodom. Abraham's reply was, 'Perhaps fifty righteous persons shall be found therein. Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked. This be far from thee to destroy the righteous with the wicked. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' Here Abraham plainly assumes that God was under a moral obligation to distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, and that He had no right to deal with them alike. Or in other words, Abraham assumes that it was the solemn duty of God to deal with the righteous and the wicked according to their respective characters--that to do so would be right, and that not to do so would be wrong in God.

6. God does not resent this assumption of Abraham, that He was under a moral obligation, but most fully acknowledges it. He did not say to Abraham, How dare you assume and insinuate that I am the subject of moral obligation--that any thing is obligatory on me--that I can be called to the discharge of duty? He gave Abraham no such reproof as this, but freely and fully admits the assumption of Abraham and proceeds to give him to understand, that the Judge of all the earth would do right, and that He knew too well what was obligatory upon Him to consent to destroy the righteous with the wicked.

Some people seem to feel shocked at the supposition that God should be under moral obligation. But they may just as well be offended with the supposition that He has moral character. If He does not owe obedience to the law of benevolence, then benevolence in Him is not right. It is no virtue. If God is above law, He is above virtue. If He is above moral obligation, He is above having moral character, and above being praise or blame-worthy for any thing. The conviction has been many a time crowded upon my mind, that the religion of a great multitude of its professors, is mere superstition. They are shocked with any rational view of God's character. They are offended with his being represented as the subject of moral obligation. They seem not to know at all why He is praiseworthy, and if their view of the subject were true, He would not be praise-worthy. Multitudes of professors seem to praise Him for doing that which they suppose Him under no moral obligation to do. But if He were under no moral obligation to do it--if the law of benevolence did not require it at his hands, it were neither wise nor virtuous in Him to do it, and therefore for doing it He would deserve no thanks.

Whenever I see persons manifest a spirit of opposition to the idea that God is under law, is the subject of moral obligation, and that virtue in Him, as in all other beings, is only a compliance with the great law of benevolence, I know that the religion of such persons must be superstition. It cannot be that they have the true knowledge of God, of his character, relations, and government, and that they either praise or respect Him for any good reason. Their worshiping Him for such reasons as are in their minds, He must consider

as injurious and insulting.

7. The Bible every where takes it for granted that right and wrong are as applicable to God as to any other being, and that virtue in Him, as in every other being is a compliance with moral obligation.

Hence let me say again, that He is not, as we are, under obligation to one above Himself, for no such one exists. But He is under obligation to the law of benevolence as it is imposed on Him by his own reason.

Some seem to suppose that the reason why God cannot sin, is that He is above law, that his arbitrary will is law, and that whatever He wills or can will, must be right simply because his will is law. But such persons do not consider that if this theory is true, He can no more be holy than He can sin, for if there be not some rule of conduct obligatory upon Him, He has no standard of action, nothing with which to compare his own conduct, and can in fact have no moral character. Now the reason why God cannot sin, is not because He is naturally unable to sin, nor because selfishness in Him would not be sin. But it is said He cannot sin, because He is voluntarily holy, infinitely disposed not to sin.

IV. All moral beings are bound to be willing that God should do right.

If He is under a moral obligation to do right, no one can have any right to object to his doing right, for this would be absurd. It would imply the existence of contradictory rights or obligations--that God was under a moral obligation to do that which other beings were under a moral obligation to prevent if they could. It must be that whatever the law of benevolence requires of God, whatever the highest good of being demands that He should do, all moral beings are bound to be willing that He should do.

V. What is implied in being willing that God should do right?

1. It implies the love of right for its own sake.

2. It implies a willingness that He should require of all his subjects just what He does require. He never legislates without good reason. He has no right to do so, and never does enact any laws that are not required by the highest good of being. He therefore does nothing, more nor less, than to comply with his own duty, in requiring of every moral being just what He does. To be willing, therefore, that God should do right, is to be willing that He should require just what He does in all instances, and for the very reasons for which He requires it.

3. It implies a willingness to do whatever He requires. He requires of every one of you just what He ought to require, and if you are willing that He should do right, you are of course willing that He should require this of you. And if you are willing that He should require it, it must be that you are willing to do it.

4. Outward doing is necessitated by inward willing. Therefore a willingness that God should do right, implies the actual doing of whatever He requires of you, so far as you know it.

5. It implies a willingness in you that all events should be disposed of according to his sovereign pleasure--that He should send the finally impenitent to hell, for this is right--that He should send your own children, if they be finally impenitent, to hell, or that He should send you to hell, if the law of benevolence requires it at his hands. If the rule of right, if the highest good of the universe demanded that you be sent to hell, it is God's duty to send you there, and you have no right to object, but are bound to consent with all your heart.

6. It implies in you a spirit of perfect benevolence. No man is willing that God should in all things do right, who is not disinterestedly and perfectly benevolent.

7. It implies in you a spirit of the same uprightness that there is in God--that you love right as He loves it--that you are actuated by the same motives that actuate Him, and that in your measure you have the same regard to right that He has. In other words, a willingness that God should in all things do right, implies, in your measure, the same perfection of willingness that there is in God.

VI. This state of mind is indispensable to salvation.

1. Because nothing short of this state of mind can be virtue at all. If in any thing you are unwilling that God should do right, you are in rebellion against Him.

2. If in any thing you are unwilling that God should do right, it is impossible that for the time being you should have a supreme regard to what is right, or to the authority or will of God. So that there cannot possibly be any virtue or holiness in one who is unwilling that God should in all things do right.

3. To be willing that God should in all things do right, is essential to happiness, and therefore indispensable to salvation. God will do right whether you are willing or not. If you consent to it and are joyful in it, you can be happy under his government. But if you are unwilling, He will do his duty without asking your leave, and however much it may fret or distress you.

4. His doing right will extend to all beings--to every one of you as well as to every body else. And if in any thing you are crossed or offended by his doing right, there is no remedy for it, for He will do it although it may be the means of destroying you forever.

5. All moral beings will know that God does right--that He does universally and perfectly right, and no one can prevent it. It is self evident that no one can be happy or saved, who is not supremely pleased with his doing universally and perfectly right.

REMARKS.

1. Strictly speaking there is no such thing as a work of supererogation in God or in any other being. By a work of supererogation is intended the doing of something that one was not of right under obligation to do, something not required by law. In morals, a work of supererogation would be something not required by the law of benevolence. Now if there were any such thing as a work of supererogation in God or any other moral being, it could not be benevolence or virtue. It could not be praise-worthy. If it were not required by the law of benevolence, it could be neither wise nor good. But if required by the law of love, it is not properly speaking a work of supererogation.

2. The common notion of the imputed righteousness of Christ, by which many maintain that the saints are to be saved, is a papal superstition. It has no foundation whatever in truth. The fact is that Christ did no more than to comply with the great law of universal benevolence. Both as God and man, his obligation to be universally and perfectly benevolent was complete. He did no more than under the circumstances was his duty to do--no more than the exigencies of the government of God required--no more than to comply with the great law of universal love. Had he done any thing more or less than this, it would neither have been wise nor good.

3. Do not understand me to say that sinners would have any cause of complaint if He had not died for them. They had forfeited all claims to favor. So far as they were concerned, He might have visited upon them the penalty of the law. But to his own nature He owed the obligation of perfect benevolence. To Himself and to the virtuous universe he was under an obligation to make a sacrifice of Himself, if by so doing he could promote a greater good than the evil He suffered.
4. If there could be such a thing as a work of supererogation, that is, doing that which the law of benevolence did not require, such a work would be sin and not holiness.
5. The spirit of the law and of the gospel is identical--both require universal and perfect benevolence.
6. There is no proper distinction between law and equity. This distinction in morals has no foundation.
7. Strictly and properly speaking there is no distinction between what is lawful and what is expedient. And when Paul says, 'All things are lawful for me but all things are not expedient,' we are to understand him only as speaking in a general way, and not as designing to affirm that in the most proper sense a thing might be lawful, and yet not expedient. Expediency is that which, under the circumstances, is demanded by the highest good. But this is identically the spirit of the law. A thing may be contrary to the letter of the law which is expedient. But the spirit of the law requires that every interest should be treated according to its relative value--that of two evils, one of which is unavoidable, the least shall be suffered--that of two goods, but one of which can be secured, the greatest shall be preferred. The letter of the law and real expediency may be at variance. But the spirit of the law and true expediency are always identical.
8. There is no law of right separate from the law of benevolence. Justice is only a modification of benevolence. And nothing is just or right that is not in accordance with the law of benevolence. By justice and mercy nothing more is intended than benevolence acting in different relations--the end always being the same, the promotion of the highest good.
9. God sends the wicked to hell for the same reason for which he takes the righteous to heaven, that is, in both cases He designs to promote the highest good. When sinners come into such relations that the highest good demands that He should send them to hell, He does so for that reason. And when the righteous come into such relations that the highest good demands that He should take them to heaven, He does so for that reason.
10. The Atonement and all that God does for the salvation of sinners, is done by Him in compliance with the great law of benevolence. Had it not been a compliance with duty, it would not have been virtue.
11. See from this subject what constitutes the sovereignty of God. Many persons seem to speak and think of the divine sovereignty as if it consisted in God's acting arbitrarily, without any regard to moral obligation--that in his sovereign acts He has no other reason than that so it seems good in his sight. They speak of his sovereignty as if He had no good reason for willing as He does, but that such is his pleasure, entirely irrespective of the reason why it is his pleasure. Now this is a most odious and injurious view of the character of God. God's sovereignty is and can be nothing else than benevolence acting independently. It consists in his doing his duty without asking the leave of any one. It consists in his doing right without let or hindrance from any one.
12. Those who are not pleased with the sovereignty of God when they rightly understand it, cannot be Christians. If they are not willing that God should consult his own wisdom and do what He regards to be

his own duty, they are rebels and the enemies of God and of all good.

13. God will never punish the wicked to gratify any feelings of resentment, in the proper acceptation of the term. I suppose that the very nature of God demands that the finally impenitent should be punished. His reason affirms that he ought to be miserable who is wicked, and that therefore God could not consult the highest good, could not promote his own happiness, nor the happiness of holy beings, unless He acted in conformity with this affirmation of his own reason, and of the reason of every moral being, and inflicted merited punishment upon the incorrigibly wicked. If God is a moral being, as we have shown, we know from our own consciousness as moral beings, that from the laws of his very nature, his reason affirms the justice of inflicting punishment upon the wicked--that punishment and sin ought to go together, and that God cannot be satisfied with Himself, and holy beings cannot be satisfied with Him, unless He inflict punishment upon the finally impenitent. The highest good must therefore demand that He punish the wicked. This is implied in what Abraham says: 'Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? This be far from thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' Here it is as plainly implied as possible, that to punish the wicked is right.

14. Let it not be thought that God or any holy being has pleasure in the infliction of pain for its own sake. Misery never is and never can be regarded by a moral being as a good in itself. It can never be chosen for its own sake. It can never be chosen as an end by any moral being but only as a means of promoting the blessedness of the universe. Such is the nature of moral beings that they affirm by a law of their nature, over which they have no control, that sin deserves punishment, and that if sinners persevere in sin they must be punished. And although by a law of their own nature, they look upon misery as an evil in itself, yet under a moral government they look upon the punishment of finally impenitent sinners as a less evil than impunity in sin.

15. It should always be understood then that God punishes sinners for public reasons--the nature of moral beings being such that the realization of the idea of public justice is promotive of, and demanded by the highest happiness of the universe. For this reason and for this reason alone God punishes the finally impenitent.

16. For the same reason He forgives and saves the penitent, that is, to realize the idea of right, fitness, and public justice. Every thing considered, it is, upon the whole, best, reasonable, and right, in view of the atonement of Christ and the penitence of the sinner, that he should not suffer the penalty of the law, but that he should be forgiven and saved. Therefore in the salvation of the penitent sinner, public justice is not set aside, but in saving him, God goes upon the principle of public justice, that is, his so doing under the circumstances, is in the highest degree conducive of the public interests. Hence the Apostle John represents the salvation of the penitent as an act of justice. I John 1:9: 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

17. The law of right requires that God should punish the wicked as much and as long as the public good requires.

18. In a government that is to last throughout eternity, the punishment of sin must be endless, for very important and manifest reasons. There will need to be under such a government, a steady, perpetual, and eternal monument upon which the nature, the demerit, the history and the results of sin shall be recorded. Truth is the great instrument of controlling mind. Let the history of the Temperance Reformation illustrate what I mean. Under a moral government, I suppose it was impossible for God to bring about the

temperance reformation, until the nature and tendencies of the use of alcohol, could in some way be known.

But when its nature was developed, its tendencies perceived, and its history written in the blood of millions of souls, there were then sufficient materials on hand, with which to assail it and crowd it back--shall I say to hell from whence it came? The monster intemperance, came up upon the length and breadth of the land, clad in a mantle of light. He found his way into every habitation, and smiled, and dealt out excitement, and deceived the nations. Alcohol was every where regarded as a friend.

Its presence was deemed indispensable to health and happiness. It was prescribed by the physician almost as a catholicon. It was taken even by the clergy as an auxiliary in the discharge of their holy functions. All classes of persons supposed themselves to be blessed by it. And until it had destroyed its millions, so deep were its deceptive influences, that men could not be awakened to regard it as an enemy. But now its mask is off. It is known. Its history is written in blood, and who does not know that for the use of future generations this history is an indispensable safeguard?

Should the present or any future generation succeed in banishing alcohol from the world, by exhibiting in every country its true history, who does not know that except these records be preserved, and the public mind kept sufficiently awake, that the same scenes will, in future, be acted over again, and that nothing can prevent so dire a catastrophe but the keeping in perpetual memory the nature, the history, and the results of using alcohol. As moral beings, it is impossible to preserve future generations of mankind from intemperance, but by the universal presence of information upon this subject.

Now for the same reason that the history of alcohol will need to be kept in perpetual memory, for the same reason will the endless history of sin, its details, and results need to be kept before the public mind. Something must be done that shall be a virtual penciling of the history of sin, in characters of light upon every part of the universe. The dealings of God with the impenitent must be such as to be the subject of eternal conversation and excitement throughout the whole universe.

His dealings must be so public, and so perpetual as never to be forgotten. It must be a record that cannot but be read by every moral being. It must teach a thrilling and perpetual lesson to all moral beings in all worlds, as long as moral beings shall exist. And if at any time his public dealings with sinners should cease and fall into forgetfulness, the impression would of course be done away upon the universe. And who can say that all the horrors of another apostacy from God would not be the result?

19. Those who are not willing that God should send the wicked to hell cannot be saved. If the execution of the sentence upon the finally impenitent will make them miserable they must be miserable.

20. None are willing that God should do right who do not do right themselves. This is self evident.

21. Unless doing right is supremely pleasing to you, you cannot be saved.

22. Anxious sinners are often distressed for fear God will do right. If they remain in sin God will certainly send them to hell. This would be right. This it would be his duty to do. But this is the cause of the sinner's anxiety. He fears God will do what He ought.

23. We see what true submission is. It consists in a willingness to have God do, in all things, with us and ours, through all the universe and to all eternity, just right--to dispose of all we have and are just as the highest good of the universe shall demand.

24. What a glorious consideration it is that the Supreme, Universal Judge of all the earth will do right. He cannot be mistaken. He cannot be bribed. He cannot be deterred. He cannot be prevented. He will never change. He will never cease to be. What a glorious consideration to be under the government of such a being.

25. If his providential designs are displeasing to you, you cannot be saved. He deals with you just as He does, because it is right, because, under the circumstances, the highest good of the universe demands it. Thus He will do without asking your leave. If you are pleased with it, it is well. If you are displeased, there is no help for you.

26. God is equally good in all He does, for the best of all reasons, that He has the same ultimate reason for all He does, namely, the highest good of the universe demands it. In other words, it is right.

27. He deserves as much praise, for sending the wicked to hell, as for taking the righteous to heaven. He deserves just as much praise for what are called his judgments as for what are called his mercies, for sickness as for health, for death as for life, for hell as for heaven, for pestilence, earthquake, and tornado, under the circumstances in which they occur, as for their direct opposites under other circumstances. One law governs Him in all these things. One principle of action, one motive or intention accounts for the whole.

28. If He send any of you to hell, all heaven will be under an obligation to praise Him for it. If He send your companions or children to hell, you will be under obligation to praise Him for it. If he send your children or even yourself to hell, you will be under an eternal obligation to praise Him for it. It will always be true that He did it because it was right, because the public good demanded it, and it was therefore his duty to do it. He did it in compliance with the great law of perfect benevolence. And shall you not praise Him for being benevolent?

29. There is no good reason for being shocked at the idea, of God's being the subject of moral obligation, and acting in accordance with the dictates of law and of conscience.

30. Unless you are, according to your knowledge, as upright as God is, you are not willing He should do right, you are in rebellion against Him, and cannot be in a state of justification with God.

31. Sinners are so selfish that they would be saved at all events. Whether it would be right or wrong on the part of God to save them they neither consider nor care.

32. If God should save sinners, forgive their sins, and treat them as they desire Him to treat them, He would ruin the universe.

33. The prayers of impenitent sinners for forgiveness, are among the blackest sins in the universe. Nothing is more common than for impenitent professors of religion, and impenitent non-professors to pray that their sins may be forgiven. But to forgive their sins while they are impenitent, would not be right but infinitely wrong on the part of God. Such prayers are a virtual asking of God to commit a great sin, to abandon the public good, to ruin the universe for their sake. Let every one of you then remember that if you pray for forgiveness, when you do not repent and forsake your sin, you are guilty of the grossest insult to God, and of the highest rebellion against Him and his government.

34. Since the Atonement and in view of the promise of God, right is consistent with, and demands your salvation if you accept of Christ. By this I do not mean that upon the principle of distributive justice you

might not be justly punished. But I do mean that upon the principle of public justice, your salvation, upon these conditions, is consistent with, and demanded by the highest good.

35. Unless you comply with these conditions you must be damned, and all the holy will thank God for sending you to hell.

36. How sweet it is to think of God as the Judge of all the earth. And how deep and permanent is the consolation that in all things He will do right. Every holy being in all worlds, at all times, is ready to cry out, Let the Judge of all the earth do right. Amen and Amen.

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/charles-finney/god-under-obligation-to-do-right/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**