

A short assessment of John Piper

By all accounts Piper is an amiable and approachable man; many people think very highly of him. His books have sold in great numbers and his ministry has been embraced by a wide variety of church leaders. He has also spoken at the conferences of very many famous Reformed ministries,¹ churches and various leaders.

Some of his books have encouraged people to focus upon enjoying God and knowing him better. This has been derisively called the doctrine of 'Christian Hedonism' (phrase coined by Piper); but anything that gets Christians to seek to know God better can't be all bad; can it?

Piper also calls himself a Calvinist and is one of the spearheads of the modern New Calvinism movement found in America. And this is the problem; in fact Piper (and many of the leaders in New Calvinism) are not Calvinists at all; at best they are Amyraldians but some are worse than that.²

We see two axiomatic propositions working out in Piper over the last twenty years.

The first proposition is that error always leads to more and more errors over time. What begins as a one-degree deviation at the beginning eventually becomes walking in the opposite direction. Piper was always a confused Calvinist on key issues and could be better described as an Amyraldian. His support of the ideas that God loves all, two contradictory wills in God and the Free-Offer is inconsistent with historic Calvinism and contrary to Biblical teaching. It is not surprising that, many years later, Piper is now teaching errors on justification, sanctification and creation as well as teaching universal atonement.

The second proposition is that the desire to be all-embracing leads to compromise of theology. Piper has, unwisely, embraced a wide variety of people over the years. He thoroughly endorsed the works of Andrew Fuller without realising the serious theological compromises of the man, which amounted to confused Amyraldism, near Pelagianism and near liberalism. It is no wonder that churches under Fuller's influence later became Socinian. Piper is part of the American Reformed moderate-Charismatic movement without realising that the essential foundation of Charismatics is an unbiblical view of the Baptism in the Spirit, which leads to a host of other errors. Piper also supports many heretical and questionable leaders: Mark Driscoll, Rick Warren, Daniel Fuller and many others. Some of his friendships have got him into very hot water. Bad company ruins good morals and it is no wonder that Piper's theology has degenerated. On top of this, some of his sources are heretical, such as favouring mystics.

So, sad as it is, it is necessary that we evaluate some of Piper's errors so that Christians can be warned.

¹ Such as the Banner of Truth conference.

² For instance, John MacArthur is a confused Amyraldian and a Dispensationalist; both these positions are incompatible with Calvinism.

Piper's background

- Piper majored in literature and minored in philosophy at Wheaton College (1964-1968). He studied Romantic Literature with C. S. Kilby, a CS Lewis scholar. This cemented his love of poetry and poetic expression, found in his flowery writings.
- Piper completed a Bachelor of Divinity degree at Fuller Theological Seminary (1968-1971). Fuller is a liberal institution, which denies the inerrancy of the Bible. Here he was very impressed by Daniel Fuller, whom he described as the most influential living teacher in his life. [Fuller denies justification by faith; he wrote: '*I would say that Moses was justified by the work, or obedience, of faith.... (There are) many passages in Scripture in which good works are made the instrumental cause of justification.*'³ He claimed that Calvin had to twist Scripture in order to prove justification by faith.]
- Piper did his doctorate at the University of Munich in West Germany (1971-1974).
- He went on to teach Biblical Studies at the liberal Bethel College in St. Paul, Minnesota (1974-80).
- In 1980 Piper became the senior pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis.

Already we can see dangerous influences working upon the young Piper. Note that his favourite teacher taught a denial of Biblical justification, as well as confusion on law and Gospel. Piper says of Fuller, '*His major work, The Unity of the Bible...., is explanatory background to most of what I write.*'⁴

Piper's support of questionable people

Authors that Piper quotes favourably

- Andrew Fuller – Near-liberal Amyraldian. See later and also see my book, '*The Problem of Fullerism*'. [Piper: '*I am working on Andrew Fuller for the Pastors' Conference [2007]. Andrew Fuller was the major ropeholder for William Carey and a very shrewd "understander" of Calvinism in his eighteenth-century day.*'⁵]
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer - liberal theologian who was executed for his involvement in an assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler. ⁶
- Dallas Willard - leader in the mystical spiritual formation movement.⁷
- G.K. Chesterton -Roman Catholic author.⁸
- Richard Foster – former Quaker and mystic; promoter of Roman Catholic mysticism into evangelical circles.⁹
- CS Lewis – Roman Catholic, semi-mystic, Cambridge Medievalist literature professor. Piper's church has a course entitled: '*Live Like a Narnian: Christian Discipleship in C.S. Lewis.*' The Narnia Chronicles are not so much Biblical but are centred upon the characteristic symbolism of the seven planets of medieval cosmology and astrology;

³ Fuller, *A Response on the Subjects of Works and Grace*, 79. Quoted from John W. Robbins; *Pied Piper*. The Trinity Review.

⁴ Daniel P. Fuller, *A Response on the Subjects of Works and Grace*, Presbiterion: A Journal for the Eldership, Volume IX, Numbers 1-2, Spring-Fall 1983, 76.

⁵ A '*Conversation with the Pastors*' (September 29, 2006); 2006 Desiring God National Conference.

⁶ Piper; *When I Don't Desire God*, p90.

⁷ Piper; *When I Don't Desire God*, p119. This is a channel through which mystical contemplative prayer is entering the church.

⁸ Piper; *When I Don't Desire God*, p196.

⁹ Piper; *When I Don't Desire God*, p192-3.

‘spiritual symbols of permanent value’ (Lewis).¹⁰ This is an unbiblical portrayal of mystical Christianity.¹¹ Lewis’ book, *Weight of Glory*, had great influence Piper when he was young. [In this book Lewis criticised people who denied the value of the self-interested pursuit of joy, averring that Christians had a duty to be as happy as possible. (Ring any bells? See Christian Hedonism later).]

- Doug Wilson – Federal Vision teacher (a major heresy which teaches salvation by works within a Presbyterian covenant).
- Tim Keller – promoter of Emergent/Contemplative Spirituality; supporter of Willow Creek, various false teachings, including denial of a young earth.
- Beth Moore – promoter of Contemplative Prayer; supporter of Romanism. Piper, ‘I’m happy to learn from Beth Moore.’¹²

Leaders he associates with

- Rick Warren [Pastor, Saddleback Church] – Pelagian false teacher; promotes Romanism and the Emergent Church¹³. Piper, ‘At root I think he is theological and doctrinal and sound.’¹⁴ Piper invited Warren to the *Desiring God Conference 2010* but Warren later backed out but sent a video instead.
- Mark Driscoll – foul mouthed, compromised, authoritarian preacher; co-founder of the Emergent Church movement. Author of ‘*Porn Again*’. Material on his website has a government warning (MH-17), only for people aged over 17. Piper invited him to speak at the *Desiring God Conference 2006* and the national 2008 conference.

Ecumenism

- Piper was invited to the Lausanne Conference 2010 and asked to sit on its US Council.

Again we can see, just from the company he keeps and the writers he considers as influences, that there are deep issues and questions as to what Piper really believes.

From this point we must evaluate what Piper himself tells us about his beliefs. They are disturbing.

Piper is not a Calvinist

Piper claims to be Calvinist and even moderate Reformed men have accepted him as such; in fact, Piper is very far from historic Calvinism for these reasons.

¹⁰ These ‘planets’ were: the sun, the moon, Mars, Mercury, Venus, Jupiter, and Saturn. Until the invention of the telescope 400 years ago there were believed to be only seven planets. Lewis took these planets and turned them into plots.

¹¹ *The Narnia Code: C. S. Lewis and the Secret of the Seven Heavens* by Michael Ward. Note Ward: ‘The central character, the lion, Aslan, is a Christ-like figure who creates the world of Narnia, redeems it, and eventually judges it. These biblical parallels are very clear in three of the seven books. But when you look at the other four Narnia Chronicles, it’s less easy to see obvious biblical parallels. Sure, Aslan is still Christ-like in various ways – guiding people, forgiving people, and so on – but there’s no major scriptural episode of Christ’s life or ministry that is being ‘reimagined’ for this magical world. No Narnian version of the birth of Christ, for example. No Narnian ascension story. No Narnian Pentecost. Why does Aslan enter the story among dancing trees in *Prince Caspian* and then give a great war-cry? Why does he fly in a sunbeam in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*? Why does he not appear in the land of Narnia at all in *The Silver Chair*? *The Narnia Code- an interview with Michael Ward*; Theology Network.org and *Evangelicals Now*, June 2009.

¹² Interview footage at <http://apprising.org/2012/01/04/john-piper-im-happy-to-learn-from-beth-moore/>

¹³ The Emergent Church teaches Post-modern liberalism.

¹⁴ Video - Invitation to Warren to attend *Desiring God Conference 2010*; copied to <http://www.sharperiron.org/filings/3-31-10/14433>

He teaches universal atonement

Most people who, who are having a hard time, they're not all Arminians, having a hard time with limited atonement. That is the atonement that effects something special for a limited group.

I think I know what they all mean, and I'm going to quote Millard Erickson's theology because I think he's right. He says:

'God intended the atonement to make salvation possible for all persons. Christ died for all persons but this atoning death becomes effective only when accepted by the individual. While this is the view of all Arminians, it is also the position of some Calvinists, who are sometimes referred to as sublapsarians.¹⁵

If that's the view of all Arminians I totally agree with it. No qualifications. So if you say "did christ die for all people" and I say "what do you mean for all people?" and you answer "I mean did he die in such a way so that anybody anywhere who believes will be saved by that blood."

I say "absolutely he did." That's John 3:16 pure and simple. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son in such a way that whoever believes will not perish, I believe that totally without qualification. Every individual person on planet earth who believes in Jesus has their life covered by the blood of Jesus. So you preach that, you stand up on Sunday morning and you say Christ died in such a way so that anybody in this room who believes, your sins are covered by the blood of Jesus.¹⁶

So, Piper's view of the atonement is that, 'Christ died for all persons but this atoning death becomes effective only when accepted by the individual.' This is pure Arminianism. Piper knows this but agrees with it anyway. He holds this view so that he can preach the Free-Offer, 'you preach ... on Sunday morning and you say Christ died in such a way so that anybody in this room who believes, your sins are covered by the blood of Jesus'. This is not Calvinism. Calvinism teaches that the atonement is only effective for the elect and that none of Christ's blood is wasted on those who reject him by divine predestination.

Holding to Amyraldism in the past, which teaches a contradictory Hypothetical Universalism, has led, over time, to Piper developing Arminian universal atonement.

He teaches conditional justification

This is a key issue: Piper fails to understand Biblical justification and puts the emphasis upon human works instead of Christ's merits, summarised by theologians as his active and passive obedience. [That is, his active obedience in fulfilling the law perfectly, and his passive obedience in submitting to his death on the cross.]

Piper says,

Present justification is based on the substitutionary work of Christ alone, enjoyed in union with him through faith alone. Future justification is the open confirmation and declaration that in Christ Jesus we are perfectly blameless before God. This final judgment accords with our works. That is, the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives will be brought forward as the evidence and confirmation of true faith and union with Christ. Without that validating transformation, there will be no future salvation.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Christian Theology*, chapter 39, p829. Piper quotes it incorrectly, the proper quote is given here. Erickson rejects Limited Atonement and argues against it the rest of the chapter. Erickson writes, 'In addition, we must consider statements like 2 Peter 2:1, which affirms that some for whom Christ died do perish.' (*Christian Theology*, chapter 39, p834). 'We conclude that the hypothesis of universal atonement is able to account for a larger segment of the biblical witness with less distortion than is the hypothesis of limited atonement.' (*Christian Theology*, chapter 39, p835.)

¹⁶ John Piper; Acts 29 conference; *The Whole Glory of God – Imputation – Impartation of His righteousness*, Part 2.16.

¹⁷ <http://contrast2.wordpress.com/2009/11/06/john-pipers-justification-according-to-works/>

Here he states plainly that future justification is based upon works. This is a confusion of justification and sanctification. Furthermore, there is no future justification. Justification is a once for all declaration of righteousness made in heaven so that God can legally adopt us as sons. The doctrine of perseverance is based upon the fact that justification covers the whole of life.

Let's take some other quotes from Piper to show that this is not simply miss-statement.¹⁸

God justifies us on the first genuine act of saving faith, but in doing so he has a view to all subsequent acts of faith contained.

God does not have in view any works of man when he justifies him. We are justified solely on the basis of Christ's merits alone.

We could be confident that because of our faith we already stand righteous before him. Wrong. Again it is because of the merits of Christ's obedience that we stand righteous before God. The faith exercised as the means to gain justification is not a human work but a gift from God.

We must also own up to the fact that our final salvation is made contingent upon the subsequent obedience which comes from faith.

Nothing in our salvation is contingent upon our actions. Salvation is from God. It is 100% controlled by God and provided by God; it is dependent upon man in nothing. The idea that salvation is a combination of our faith, works and God's grace is both the theology of Arminianism and Roman Catholicism.

We are justified on the basis of our first act of faith because God sees in it (like he can see the tree in an acorn) the embryo of a life of faith.

Again Piper puts the emphasis on man's work as in Arminianism. God does not see our initial faith as an embryo of future good works by us. Saving faith is a gift from God not a work of man. But even this does not justify us; we are justified by the work of Christ not our faith. Faith is the God-given means to appropriate Christ's righteousness.

This is why those who do not lead a life of faith with its inevitable obedience simply bear witness to the fact that their first act of faith was not genuine.

Piper does not understand justification and saving faith at all. He is Arminian in this respect.

I think that what Piper is trying to say here is that genuine Christians will do good works and demonstrate their true faith but professing Christians will not. But the way he has expressed this is so theologically sloppy that he has actually promoted heresy. If he cannot see this, on such a fundamental issue, then he should not be a teacher.

It is unequivocal that Piper is confused about justification and expresses his teaching on it in such a way as to promote serious heresy. His expressions actually teach final salvation by works.

Summary

Without looking at other subjects, we can affirm that Piper is unbiblical in his teaching on Christ's atonement and unbiblical in his teaching on justification by faith. These two elements are fundamental to Calvinism. Piper, therefore, cannot be a Calvinist and is unbiblical in essential doctrines. Worse is to come.

¹⁸ The quotes are from his website: http://www.desiringgod.org/library/topics/doctrines_grace/tulip.html

Piper is not Biblical in other areas

He is open to the young earth view of creation

John Piper says:

The earth is billions of years old if it wants to be, whatever science says it is, it is!¹⁹

His comments in the interview that this is taken from are obtuse, superficial and contradictory. He seems to hold an unusual view of the old Gap Theory²⁰ so that he can embrace the views of modern science.

His absolute acceptance of modern science is also worrying. Scientific theories change all the time as old theories are overthrown. Would he believe in Eugenics, once accepted as scientific fact? Does he believe in Evolution, often stated as a scientific fact? Does he accept the scientists who state that homosexuality is genetic?

He is confused about faith and the life of faith²¹

The focus of my trust is what God promised to do for me in the future.²²

This is contrary to the focus that God commands in church gatherings every Sunday, which is centred in the bread and wine. The believer is to remember the death of Christ and the resurrection as the centre of his salvation. The believer is not pointed to the future but to the past where the work of Christ achieved everything. Notice Paul's focus, 'we preach Christ crucified' (1 Cor 1:23) and 'I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.' (1 Cor 2:2) and 'God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Gal 6:14). We are to set our minds on Christ not on the consummation of our faith in the future. Christ must be pre-eminent.

Piper is fascinated by this future aspect of the Christian life, mentioning the phrase 'future grace' constantly in his works, beginning in 1995 with, *'The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in....Future Grace'*. This future grace is conditional. His focus is the works believers do to complete the work of salvation to meet those conditions. This focus even devalues thanksgiving because it makes the believer look backwards instead of forwards. For Piper it is faith in future grace that motivates obedience, not thanksgiving for what Christ has done.

When we try to make gratitude empower this future obedience, something goes wrong. Gratitude is pri-marily a response to the past grace of God; it malfunctions when forced to function as motivation for the future.²³

This grace is somewhat like the Roman idea of infused grace; it is subjective and not the gift of God: *'the heart-strengthening power that comes from the Holy Spirit....is virtually the same*

¹⁹ <http://testallthings.com/2010/12/28/john-pipers-heretical-view-of-creation/> The whole quote is: 'Or he might take Sailhamer's view, which is where I feel at home. His view is that what's going on here is that all of creation happened to prepare the land for man. In verse 1, "In the beginning he made the heavens and the earth," he makes everything. And then you go day by day and he's preparing the land. He's not bringing new things into existence; he's preparing the land and causing things to grow and separating out water and earth. And then, when it's all set and prepared, he creates and puts man there. So that has the advantage of saying that the earth is billions of years old if it wants to be—whatever science says it is, it is—but man is young, and he was good and he sinned. He was a real historical person, because Romans 5 says so, and so does the rest of the Bible.'

²⁰ Which posits a gap of millions of years between Gen 1:1 and Gen 1:2.

²¹ I acknowledge a debt to John W Robbins' paper, *Pied Piper*, here, from which I have extracted some key themes.

²² *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in....Future Grace*, p6.

²³ *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in....Future Grace*, p47.

as what I mean by future grace'.²⁴ This is a subtle shifting of our attention from the finished work of Christ in the past, the basis of our standing with God and the work of the Holy Spirit to guide us into understanding what Christ has done for us, instead it centres on our subjective experiences and works. This faith work justifies us in future.²⁵ This rings of the teaching of his mentor, Daniel Fuller.²⁶

Piper denies faith when he says, '*All the covenants of God are conditional covenants of grace ... They offer all-sufficient future grace for those who keep the covenant.*'²⁷ In other words, to those who work and fulfil the conditions. This is heresy. Firstly, the New Covenant is not conditional on any work of man but on the work of Christ alone. Secondly, faith is the entrance into this covenant and this faith is a gift; and thirdly, faith is the continuance in the covenant; 'as it is written, "The just shall live by faith"' (Rm 1:17).

In pursuing his argument he writes nonsense, such as: '*It is possible to meet a condition for receiving grace and yet not earn the grace. Conditional grace does not mean earned grace.*'²⁸ This contravenes basic English. Meeting a condition to receive grace is a work; conditional grace implies work. If I work to get this grace, then it is earned and thus ceases to be grace (something unmerited). Piper even tries to redefine 'works' to avoid this saying that '*The term "works," refers to the warfare of righteousness unempowered by faith....in future grace.*'²⁹ This is just more semantic nonsense. It is similar to the tactics used by Andrew Fuller (esteemed by Piper) who constantly changed the meaning of words to fool his readers into appropriating the opposite of what they thought. Anyone who plays with words like this, instead of plain teaching, is not to be trusted.

Piper also separates the soul of the believer into an unbiblical dichotomy between the head and the heart: '*belief is not merely an agreement with facts in the head; it is also an appetite for God in the heart.*'³⁰ This is also an implicit condemnation of Biblical, rational faith and worship. Belief is actually the trust of the whole soul in following God, where the heart acts upon what the mind knows. The heart and the mind work in union based upon truth.

Piper again attacks the understanding when he says, '*Believing that Christ and his promises are true....is a necessary part of faith. But it is not sufficient to turn faith into saving faith.*'³¹ In fact believing on Christ is enough to save anyone (Mk 16:16; Acts 8:37, 16:31, 19:4; Rm 3:22, 10:10). Often Piper implies the need for something more with purple prose, such as, '*tasting spiritual beauty*'. This is not the clarity of theological expression that instructs saints.

In case anyone is not convinced that Piper preaches works salvation he gives us more proof, '*I am hard pressed to imagine something more important for our lives than fulfilling the covenant that God has made with us for our final salvation.*'³² This is heresy of the first order. What is most important is that Christ fulfilled the covenant for us. Piper even lists eleven conditions we must fulfil, including loving God, being humble, fearing God etc, but also

²⁴ Ibid, p69.

²⁵ Ibid, p191.

²⁶ '*A faith that only looks back to Christ's death and resurrection is not sufficient.... Forgiveness for the Christian also depends on having....a futuristic faith in God's promises. Thus we cannot regard justifying faith as sufficient if it honours only the past fact of Christ's death and resurrection but does not honour the future promises of God.*' (Fuller; *The Unity of the Bible; Unfolding God's plan for Humanity*, p206-207).

²⁷ *The Purifying Power of Living by Faith in....Future Grace*, p248.

²⁸ Ibid, p79.

²⁹ Ibid, p220.

³⁰ Ibid, p86.

³¹ Ibid, p201.

³² Ibid, p249.

doing good deeds. He fails to see that these are the fruit of the Spirit, which he works in us through Christ. This is Christ being formed in us.

Without doubt, Piper's concept of Future Grace more than implies works righteousness in salvation. In this it correlates with many other heretical propositions about work righteousness that are being published in current American churches (such as the New Perspective on Paul, Federal Vision, and Daniel Fuller's works). For this reason alone Piper should be avoided.

Christian Hedonism³³

This idea is what brought Piper his initial fame, expressed in books like *Desiring God* (1986), averring that delighting in God is central to the life of faith; '*God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him*'. Other books developed this theme, such as: *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God* (2000); '*We will be most satisfied in God when we know why God himself is most satisfied in God*'.

His basic thesis is that the pursuit of happiness in God is the key dynamic in the life of the Christian, bringing power. In other words, this is a new development in the doctrine of sanctification, which centres on a subjective happiness, albeit based on God.

To glory in God is certainly a good thing; we are called to delight in God, which is the basis of worship. But elevating this principle to be a golden rule above all others and taking a principle of worship and applying it to be the fundamental basis of the Christian walk is an error.

First off, the Bible never centres upon our happiness, certainly not in this life. Personal happiness is simply not in the frame at all. What is enjoined is duty – obedience to God's law. In fact we are, many times, promised suffering and tribulation here because we do not belong to this world which fights against us (Jn 16:33; 2 Tim 3:12; 1 Pt 5:9; Rev 7:14).

Piper strives to make one principle the centre of sanctification. In this he errs just like the many previous single formulae in historical movements like those in Higher Life or the Holiness Movement.³⁴ The pursuit of one single duty while ignoring the many others is a mistake. For instance, the Bible puts a great deal of emphasises upon loving one another as being one of the key duties of the believer. Emphasising delighting in God to the exclusion of loving one another is clearly unbalanced. We must do both (and many more).

Piper quotes Jonathan Edwards in support of his theory; he also mentions the Puritans that featured sermons on delighting in God. But neither Edwards, nor the Puritans made this one duty a central plank of sanctification that would cure all ills alone. Delighting in God is simply one Christian duty among others and the central plank of worship, not our daily walk. Piper's thesis is contrary to the Puritans, the historic evangelicals and the Reformers. Books on Practical Theology always contained expositions of the many duties in the Christian life necessary to prevail, from worship, to thanksgiving, to prayer, to doing good works, to edifying others, to overcoming temptation and securing holiness, to patient endurance, to spiritual warfare.

Piper quotes many Scriptures but none of them corroborate his thesis. For example he uses texts, in support, which actually refer to eternity not now, such as Ps 16:11. He also singles out 'joy' in passages where the context enjoins several duties, not one (e.g. Ps 37:1-8).

³³ I acknowledge for some ideas from an article by Peter Masters in *Sword and the Trowel*, here (2002, No. 3).

³⁴ E.g. Hannah Whitall Smith's book *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life* (1875).

Piper's idea suggests a subjectivity in sanctification which is not healthy and this subjectivity has led, over the years since, to a greater fascination with mysticism in Piper (such as endorsing Contemplative Prayer, currently a big American fad and part of the modern syncretism with Romanism). The mystical element in Piper's vision also led him to increasingly embrace the errors of the Charismatic Movement and to subsequent involvement in the Toronto Blessing.

His system leads not only to mysticism (something Piper actually anticipated in the 80s) but it leads to self-centredness. The motivation for joy in God (in Piper's argument) is made to be the benefit I get out of it in the end. The blessings of the Christian life result from having this delight in God. Delighting in God is a Christian duty, with many others, that should be pursued as part of knowing God better; it should not be pursued so that I can get more benefits. When hedonism is centralised, then rational, doctrinal understanding is downgraded and this is a recipe for disaster. When subjectivity is emphasised, confronting error becomes irrelevant.

The Christian life is a balance of many duties.

At the end of the day, does Scripture command this Christian Hedonism; is it clearly enjoined in apostolic teaching? The answer is no; it is not. This alone settles the matter. In fact, both the Lord himself and the apostles gave lists regarding what to do and what not to do in sanctification (e.g. Matt 5-7; 1 Tim 6.11-12; Gal 5.22-23). These lists are the opposite of Piper's single factor formula for the Christian life.

Even in the 80s, Piper knew that this idea ('*my vision*', '*my theology*') was radical, dangerous and not safe (his words). The publishing blurb for *Desiring God* calls it a '*paradigm-shattering work*'. It was because it is novel and erroneous.

He teaches two contradictory wills in God

Affirming the will of God to save all, while also affirming the unconditional election of some, implies that there are at least "two wills" in God, or two ways of willing. It implies that God decrees one state of affairs while also willing and teaching that a different state of affairs should come to pass.Therefore I affirm ... that God loves the world with a deep compassion that desires the salvation of all men. Yet I also affirm that God has chosen from before the foundation of the world whom he will save from sin. ... My contribution has simply been to show that God's will for all people to be saved is not at odds with the sovereignty of God's grace in election.³⁵

This idea has been influenced by following Amyraldian theology (whether knowingly or not) and the confused ideas of Andrew Fuller.

God's will is single; his decree is single. This is necessitated by the doctrine of God, which states that he is perfect, immutable, and single (not complicated and contradictory). From the human perspective we may differentiate certain aspects of God's will and many attempts have been made to do this. Most commonly, we can see a decretive will in God, which is his sovereign decision that always comes to pass (such as creation), and also his preceptive will, which is his moral desire [law] for men, which is disobeyed often.

However, what we cannot do is stipulate two contradictory wills in God since this would destroy the divine attributes and God ceases to be God. Such a doctrine is also illogical and nonsensical, yet this is what Piper and many others do.

³⁵ 'Are There Two Wills in God? Divine Election and God's Desire for All to Be Saved.' From *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*. Thomas Schreiner/Bruce Ware, editors (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000). This article is now an appendix in *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God* by John Piper (Sisters: Multnomah, 2 ed., 2000).

Piper says that there is a secret will in God, which only wills the elect to be saved, but that there is a revealed will in God which asserts that he loves all men, sends Christ to die for them and desires the salvation of all. Of course this posits a contradiction in God that he loves those his word says he hates; he desires the salvation of those he has damned; that he favours those he has not chosen; that he gives grace to those he decreed would never receive it and so on.

Sometimes this nonsense is portrayed as a paradox that men cannot understand; but there is no such paradox in Scripture; God's will is clearly stated: God loves some and elects them to salvation in Christ but God also reprobates others and predestines them to destruction. This is Scriptural:

The LORD has made all for Himself, yes, even the wicked for the day of doom. Prov 16:4

What if God, wanting to show *His* wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction. Rm 9:22

For the wicked are reserved for the day of doom; they shall be brought out on the day of wrath. Job 21:30

'A stone of stumbling And a rock of offence.' They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. 1 Pt 2:8

By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. 2 Pt 2:3

Then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment. 2 Pt 2:9

But it is also Protestant and Calvinistic. Here is a selection of Calvinistic and Reformation quotes throughout the last 500 years:

Martin Luther [1483-1546]

The love and hate of God towards men is immutable and eternal, existing, not merely before there was any merit or work of 'free-will', but before the world was made; [so] all things take place in us of necessity, according as He has from eternity loved or not loved ... faith and unbelief come to us by no work of our own, but through the love and hatred of God. ³⁶

John Calvin [1509-1564]

Solomon also teaches us that not only was the destruction of the ungodly foreknown, but the ungodly themselves have been created for the specific purpose of perishing (Prov. 16:4).³⁷

William Perkins [1558-1602]

The decree of reprobation is that part of predestination whereby God ... determined to reject certain men unto destruction and misery, and that to the praise of his justice ... Further, whom God rejecteth to condemnation, those he hateth.³⁸

Samuel Rutherford [1660-1661]

[Spoke of..] God's hatred of the reprobate and love and peace on the elect...[since God's love is] simple not contradictory. ³⁹

³⁶ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*,

³⁷ Calvin's *New Testament Commentaries: Romans and Thessalonians*, pp.207-208.

³⁸ William Perkins, *The Work of William Perkins*, Sutton Courtenay Press (1969) p250-251.

³⁹ Samuel Rutherford, *Trial and Triumph of Faith*, p348-350.

John Owen [1616-1683]

We deny that all mankind are the object of that love of God which moved him to send his Son to die; God having 'made some for the day of evil', Prov 16:4. ⁴⁰

It is, therefore, incorrect to translate, as in Psalm 145:9, 15-16 that God is 'merciful' not only to all men but to his whole creation ... These all feel the benefits of God's general goodness in his providential upholding of his creation ... [but] true mercy ... is the fount of all saving faith and repentance, we can distinguish this from all loose and mistaken concepts of 'mercy' displayed by the general work of God in providence. ⁴¹

But those who deny this hatred of sin and sinners, and the disposition to punish them, to be perpetually, immutably, and habitually inherent in God, I am afraid have never strictly weighed in their thoughts the divine purity and holiness. ⁴²

Francis Turretin [1623-1687]

Since his love cannot be vain and inefficacious, those whom he loves unto salvation he ought to love fully and even unto the end. ... The love treated in John 3:16 ... cannot be universal towards each and every one, but special towards a few. ⁴³

James Henry Thornwell [1812-1862]

Sinners are by nature odious and loathsome to God, and are under a righteous sentence of condemnation and death. ⁴⁴

The plain doctrine of the Presbyterian Church is that God has no purpose of salvation for all. ⁴⁵

The love of God is always connected with the purpose of salvation ... unconverted sinners have no lot nor part in it'. God is angry with them every day; "he hateth all workers of iniquity". The special love of God is confined exclusively to the elect. ⁴⁶

Dr. William Cunningham [1805-1861]

Calvin consistently, unhesitatingly, and explicitly denied the doctrine of God's universal grace to all men, -that is omnibus et singulis, to each and every man,- as implying in some sense a desire or purpose or intention to save them all ... That Calvin denied the doctrine of God's universal grace or love to all men, as implying some desire or intention of saving them all, and some provision directed to that object, is too evident to any one who has read his writings, to admit of doubt or require proof. ... The fact of Calvin so explicitly denying the doctrine of God's universal grace or love to all men, affords a more direct and certain ground for the inference, that he did not hold the doctrine of universal atonement. ⁴⁷

BB Warfield [1851-1921]

But just because God is God, of course, no one receives grace who has not been foreknown and afore-selected for the gift; and, as much of course, no one who has been foreknown and afore-selected for it, fails to receive it. Therefore the number of the

⁴⁰ John Owen, *Works*, Vol 10, p44 Banner of Truth Trust (1967), p227. Note all Owen's other arguments in this section.

⁴¹ John Owen, *Biblical Theology*, p74.

⁴² John Owen, *Works*, vol. 10, p. 514.

⁴³ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Vol 1, p400, 405.

⁴⁴ Thornwell, *Works*, Vol 2, p158.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p161.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p162.

⁴⁷ William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh (1962), p398-399.

predestinated is fixed, and fixed by God. ⁴⁸ What lies at the heart of his [Calvin's] soteriology is the absolute exclusion of the creaturely element in the initiation of the saving process. ⁴⁹

A W Pink [1886-1952]

That God loves everybody, is, we may say, quite a modern belief. The writings of the church-fathers, the Reformers or the Puritans will (we believe) be searched in vain for any such concept. Perhaps the late DL Moody ... did more than anyone else last century to popularise this concept. ⁵⁰

John H Gerstner [1914-1996]

We must sadly admit that the majority of Reformed theologians today seriously err concerning the nature of the love of God for reprobates ... Most Reformed theologians also include, as a by product of the atonement, the well meant offer of the gospel by which all men can be saved. ⁵¹

Piper is not in line with historic Calvinistic theology but is closer to Arminianism. Indeed, it gives the impression that Piper does not agree with the doctrine of unconditional election.

Concerning quotes

Muslims, Jews, Christians! Allah and Adonai are only known and loved through the crucified and risen Christ. Jn 8:19; 5:42-43.⁵²

What exactly does he mean? Why write such a theologically slovenly statement? Is he suggesting some sort of universalism?

The dark night of the soul.⁵³

This is a famous mystical reference originating from the Roman Catholic mystic St John of the Cross. However, Piper has supported other forms of Roman mysticism. Taken on its own, this could just be an unwise use of a term; but coupled with Piper's other mystical influences and theories this raises more concern.

[Richard Foster calls for] new prophets to arise in our day ... [Piper responds] And when they arise, one way that we fight for joy in God is to read what they write.⁵⁴

The current legions of Charismatic prophets are one of the causes of heresy in the church. Reading what these people write will only do harm. Piper just gives such people carte blanche. Furthermore, what on earth does he mean by saying that we have to 'fight for joy in God' by reading a book? This is typical of Piper's flowery prose that is semantically meaningless but sounds emotive.

⁴⁸ BB Warfield, *Introduction To Augustin's Anti-Pelagian Writings*; Nicene & Post Nicene Fathers, First Series, Volume 5, p106. See also, *Augustine & The Pelagian Controversy, Works* Vol 4, (Baker, 1991), p408.

⁴⁹ Warfield, *Calvinism, Works*, Vol 5, p359.

⁵⁰ A W Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, Baker, p200. The Banner of Truth edition ruthlessly extracted large portions of this work which condemn such universal notions as God loving everyone (up to 40%, including key appendices) without any notification or explanation.

⁵¹ John H Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*, p125.

⁵² Tweet: 3:00 AM - 19 Jan 12.

⁵³ Piper; *When I Don't Desire God*, p217, 229.

⁵⁴ Piper; *When I Don't Desire God*, p193.

Bad practices

- Piper promotes, or at least condones, Roman Catholic, mystical, Contemplative Prayer. [‘Mystical Contemplative Prayer’, or ‘Union’, is the feeling of being united with God, which is the third stage of the Roman Catholic mystical path. The other stages are: ‘Purification’ or discipline, particularly in terms of the human body (prayer, fasting, asceticism) and ‘Illumination’ or enlightenment of mind; consciousness of spiritual realities; perceiving God or a transcendent order. These basic stages of mysticism feature in many medieval mystics whose teaching is not just erroneous but is anti-Christian.]
- Piper associates with known heretics and supports them.
- Piper invites false teachers to his conferences.
- Piper promotes the works of false teachers.

Conclusion

John Piper is typical of the modern ‘all things to all men’, semi-Reformed church leader. In his striving to be inclusive, all-embracing and tolerant, his theology becomes utterly compromised and increasingly heretical. He can no longer be termed an Amyraldian or a Four-Point Calvinist but his theology is outright Arminian in key areas and getting worse.

His works are emotive, subjective and often mystical, but frequently also confusing, sloppy and theologically contrived. Sometimes it is hard to understand what he actually means and sometimes it seems that what he says is meaningless. Yet this very emotive meandering is alluring to a certain type of person.

At the end of the day we have to judge Piper on the basis of Biblicity. Piper does not pass this test and must be condemned as a false teacher; if only on the basis of his errors on the atonement and justification alone. If someone teaches errors about justification then the Lord’s people must avoid them or their lives will be ruined, as this is such a fundamental doctrine. As Martin Luther said it is the doctrine on which the church stands or falls. But, in fact, Piper teaches many other errors that will cause damage in addition to this.

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
© Thomas Nelson 1982

Paul Fahy Copyright © 2012
Understanding Ministries
<http://www.understanding-ministries.com>