

EDITORIAL: A DOUBLE-MINDED GOD UNSTABLE IN ALL HIS WAYS (1)

Rev. Martyn McGeown

A Fatal Concession

“My aim here is to show from Scripture that the simultaneous existence of God’s will for ‘all persons to be saved’ (I Tim. 2:4) and his will to elect unconditionally those who will actually be saved is not a sign of divine schizophrenia or exegetical confusion.” Thus begins John Piper in an article entitled, “Are There Two Wills in God?”¹

Piper fails. He fails because he concedes the argument to the Arminian right at the beginning. He acknowledges that there *is* an exegesis of I Timothy 2:4 and II Peter 3:9 which would demonstrate that the “all men” and “any” in those texts do not refer to every single human being head for head. We assume the reader is familiar with such exegesis. But, writes Piper, “this limitation of God’s universal saving will has never been convincing to Arminians” and “[the Ezekiel trio of 18:23, 32 and 33:11] are even less tolerant of restriction.” To this we might answer, the Arian has never found our exegesis of John 14:28 or Colossians 1:15 convincing; the Romanist has never found our exegesis of Matthew 16:18 convincing; and the Charismatic has never found our exegesis of Acts 2 or I Corinthians 12-14 convincing. That is no reason to grant any ground—or even to concede the whole argument—to the theological opponent!

Before we offer what we hope is convincing exegesis of the Ezekiel passages, let us examine Piper’s supposed “solution” to a problem, a problem which he and other theologians have been forced to invent by the inconsistency of their position. In reality, there is no problem. The Scriptures plainly and consistently teach that God has decreed—and therefore desires—only the salvation of the elect. God has no desire—saving or otherwise—for the salvation of anyone else. In fact, God desires and is pleased to damn the reprobate. To that end God sent Christ to die for the elect and not to die for the reprobate. Piper

¹ John Piper, “Are There Two Wills in God? Divine Election and God’s Desire for All to Be Saved” (www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/are-there-two-wills-in-god).

claims to believe the Five Points of Calvinism but he believes—as do many other modern Calvinists—that God desires something in addition to what He has decreed in His eternal counsel concerning election and reprobation, namely the salvation of the reprobate, and that God sincerely “offers” salvation to all without exception. Moreover, Piper compromises Limited Atonement or Particular Redemption. In Article 7 of the “Elder Affirmation of Faith” of Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, where he is Senior Pastor, he confesses that “Christ died for all but not in the same way.”² Therefore, Piper, for all his popularity, is not a five-point Calvinist. He is compromised by a form of Amyraldianism.

Piper teaches that “God may desire the death of the wicked and in another sense he may not.” Piper seeks to hold in “tension”—and the Calvinists he admires do the same thing; hence one would assume that he does not admire us—“the universal saving will of I Timothy 2:4 with the individual unconditional election of Romans 9:6-23.”

A Double-Minded Deity

Piper is correct in one respect. God’s will can and indeed must be distinguished. He affirms and defends the standard Calvinist distinction between the will of God’s decree and the will of God’s command: “God [wills] for sin to come to pass while at the same time [He disapproves of] the sin;” “God intends to bring about events that involve things he forbids;” “God sometimes wills to bring about what he disapproves.” There is a sense in which God’s will is “his moral instruction” and there is a sense in which God’s will is “the state of affairs that he sovereignly [brings] about.” All of this is perfectly orthodox and helpful, and Piper appeals to the classic passage in Acts 4:27-28.

But Piper makes a grave error. He applies that perfectly legitimate and good distinction of command and decree to God’s decree itself. Piper’s god becomes double-minded and unstable at this point—willing and longing for things which he has not decreed and concerning which he has decreed the opposite. The god described by Piper “wavereth” and “is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed ... a double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:6, 8).

² “Elder Affirmation of Faith” (www.hopeingod.org/document/elder-affirmation-faith).

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Piper's "solution" is to appeal to the "complexity" of God. Now a Reformed man must pause right here. The complexity of God! We do not believe in the complexity of God, but in the simplicity of God. First, hear Piper: "God's emotional life is infinitely complex beyond our ability to fully comprehend." "Who of us could say what complex of emotions is not possible for God?" "[God's] motivation is complex and not every true element in it rises to the level of effective choice." Also, "In his great and mysterious heart there are kinds of longings and desires that are real—they tell us something true about his character. Yet not all these longings govern God's actions." What Piper is seeking to articulate is this: God desires some things more than He desires other things. God's desires are complicated. God's mercy toward the reprobate is real but not enough for Him actually to save the reprobate. There is another conflicting desire in His heart which is greater than His desire to save the reprobate. That desire is to glorify Himself in His justice.

Both the double-minded god of Piper and the god of Arminianism face the same dilemma. In both schemes, God "wills something that in fact does not happen." Many people perish whom God supposedly desires to save—and, in the case of Piper's god, longs to save with a complex emotion of compassionate desires. Given this dilemma, Piper sees certain possibilities. The first possibility is that "there is a power in the universe greater than God's which is frustrating him by overruling what he wills." Piper rightly rejects that idea. The other possibility, which Piper affirms and seeks to defend, is that "God wills not to save all, even though he is willing to save all, because there is something else that he wills more, which would be lost if he exerted his sovereign power to save all." Remember Piper wants to avoid double speak? He fails!

What is that more desirable thing than God's desire to save all? The Arminian would say that "human self-determination and the possible resulting love relationship with God are more valuable than saving all people by sovereign efficacious grace." Free will is more important to God than the salvation of all men! God would rather see the majority of people go to hell than "violate" one man's free will! That is Piper's evaluation of Arminianism—and Piper is tolerant of Arminianism! Piper's answer is different: "the greater value is the manifestation of the full range of God's glory in wrath and mercy (Rom. 9:22-23) and the humbling of man so that he enjoys giving all credit to God for his salvation." Piper's god has two or more commitments. He is commit-

ted to saving all—he really wants that—and he is committed to glorifying himself in his wrath and justice. Since this god cannot have both, he allows one commitment to dominate the other in the complexity of his mind. Divine schizophrenia? Absolutely!

A Genuine But Unexercised Compassion

So here is Piper's position and supposed solution to the "problem:" God's desire to save all conflicts with another desire in God according to which He desires to glorify Himself in both His wrath and mercy. God wants to save all—He really does, and we should take Him at His word—but He restrains Himself (Piper's language) from saving all. To illustrate this, Piper quotes from Robert L. Dabney in his *Evangelical and Theological Discussions*. Dabney relates a story from the life of George Washington, who signed the death warrant of a certain Major André, who had been guilty of treason. Washington had genuine compassion on Major André, and sovereign power to save or destroy the man's life, but "Washington's volition to sign the death warrant of André did not arise from the fact that his compassion was slight or feigned," writes Dabney, "but from the fact that it was rationally counterpoised by a complex of superior judgments ... of wisdom, duty, patriotism and moral indignation." Dabney applies this illustration to God: "the absence of volition in God to save does not necessarily imply the absence of compassion." God's true compassion is "yet restrained in the case of the ... non-elect by consistent and holy reasons from taking the form of a volition to regenerate."

The consistent Calvinistic exegesis of I Timothy 2:4, II Peter 3:9 and the Ezekiel passages might be unsatisfying to an Arminian, but this explanation of God is hardly satisfying to an Arminian either and should be abhorrent to every right-thinking Reformed child of God! God has compassion on a sinner but He does not go so far as to save the sinner? What kind of compassion is that? God's real, unfeigned and genuine compassion ends in the lake of fire! God save us from the real, unfeigned and genuine compassion of Piper's (and Dabney's) muddle-headed god! There can be, in the words of Piper, "in a noble and great heart (even a divine heart) sincere compassion for a criminal that is nevertheless not set free." That might be the "compassion" of a George Washington but it can never be the compassion of Almighty God!

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God's Blessed Simplicity

Piper's exegesis—if one could even call it exegesis—is flawed for one main reason. Piper does not define any of the key concepts on which he is writing. If he did, he would be less muddle-headed and would not dare impose his double-mindedness on the Almighty. Piper writes of God's compassion, mercy or pity, and of God's complexity. The first is a biblical concept not defined or explained—perhaps it is elsewhere, but a precise definition is absent in the article we are critiquing—and the second is not biblical.

Let us begin by refuting Piper's notion of the “complexity” of God. A Reformed man (and Piper, who belongs to the neo-Calvinists, is not Reformed) is immediately reminded of what the creeds teach about the simplicity of God: “We believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God ...” (*Belgic Confession* 1). God is “a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions” (*Westminster Confession* 2:1). We are complex because we are created and fallen beings with a maelstrom of emotions. God is simple because He is the perfect God of peace and harmony. God is never confused, agitated or disturbed within His own Being. Created reality external to Himself never throws the Almighty into turmoil—not even the many prayers God must answer, something Piper mentions in an attempt to prove the complexity of God. Because God is simple, all of His attributes are equal with His Being and with one another. Therefore, God's mercy is never at odds with His justice. God *is* His mercy and God *is* His justice, and God's mercy and justice are one in Him. God's mercy, then, is an infinite, unchangeable, eternal, almighty, just and holy mercy! God only has one mercy, not two mercies. He does not have one common mercy which—although unfeigned, genuine and sincere—does not save, and another mercy which effectually saves His elect church. Moreover, because God is one and simple, His will is simple. This is because God *is* His will. God's will is not “part” of God, as if we could ever separate God's will from God Himself. God's will is God's willing, and God wills eternally and unchangeably and efficaciously. God never wills—decrees and therefore desires—things which never come to pass. God never wills contradictory things at the same time—such as to will to save all men and to will to save only some men. This is not the invention of Reformed scholastics but the teaching of Scripture. Piper knows the passages

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and even quotes them (Ps. 115:3; Isa. 46:10; Dan. 4:35; etc.), but this does not restrain Piper from attributing folly to the Almighty. About God, James writes that He is “the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (1:17).

Next time, we will critique the muddle-headed mercy of Piper’s double-minded god, and give a Reformed exegesis of the Ezekiel trio, Piper’s so-called “pillars of universal love.”

to be concluded (DV)

Editor’s Note

Welcome to the Winter/Spring 2013 edition of the *British Reformed Journal*.

At the biennial general meeting of the British Reformed Fellowship (BRF), I was nominated and elected the new editor of this journal. Michael Kimmitt remains honorary editor, and I want to express my thanks on behalf of the council of the BRF for his many years of faithful service as editor. The baton having been passed to me, we hope the only thing that shall change will be the editorial which will be my responsibility to write. The high quality of writing in the *British Reformed Journal (BRJ)*, the solid Reformed orthodoxy of the message and the fearless defence of the truth against the constant morphing of the lie, especially the lies of compromised Calvinism, will continue, the Lord giving us grace.

We are pleased, also, in this issue to publish articles by new writers, by people who—to my knowledge—have not written for the *BRJ* before, or at least not recently. To accommodate the newer writers, we have postponed some of the articles which we had already started. The articles about house-churchism, Israel and Joshua de la Place will continue in the next issue of the *BRJ* (DV).

Letters to the editor are encouraged (contact details are on the inside cover). We always welcome new articles for publication (in harmony with the doctrinal basis of the BRF, the Reformed creeds).

Rev. Martyn McGeown, Editor

Missionary-Pastor of the Limerick Reformed Fellowship