

# Does God Desire All to Be Saved?

**John Piper**



*Does God Desire All to Be Saved?*

Copyright © 2013 by John Piper

Published by Crossway

1300 Crescent Street  
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided for by USA copyright law.

This book is a revised and expanded version of material previously published in: Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, eds., *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will: Biblical and Practical Perspectives on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware, eds., *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); and John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God*, revised edition (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2000).

First printing 2013

Printed in the United States of America

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway. 2011 Text Edition. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture references marked RSV are from *The Revised Standard Version*. Copyright © 1946, 1952, 1971, 1973 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

All emphases in Scripture quotations have been added by the author.

Trade paperback ISBN: 978-1-4335-3719-6

Mobipocket ISBN: 978-1-4335-3721-9

PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-3720-2

ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-3722-6

---

## Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Piper, John, 1946-

Does God desire all to be saved? / John Piper.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4335-3719-6 (tp)

1. Election (Theology) 2. Salvation—Christianity.

3. Universalism. I. Title.

BT810.3.P575 2013

232—dc23

2013014374

---

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

VP 23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13  
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# Contents

Introduction	9
1 My Aim	13
2 Illustrations of Two Wills in God	19
3 How Extensive Is the Sovereign Will of God?	31
4 Does It Make Sense?	37
Acknowledgments	55
Desiring God: A Note on Resources	57
Scripture Index	59



# Introduction

When climbing from lowlands to mountaintops, one must often pass through clouds. That's the way it has been for me all my life as I have tried to get the best views of the glory of God.

When you enter a layer of clouds, it helps to have a guide to keep you away from the precipices and on the path to the other side of the murkiness. That's one way to view this book. I hope it will serve as a guide upward through the haze and confusion about God's electing and saving will.

I admit that some of the paths in this book are steep. And some of the steepest places are through the thickest clouds. The climb is not for everyone. We all have different gifts, and not everyone is called to this kind of intellectual climb. I don't mean that the non-climbers will see less glory or worship with less passion. There are glories in the valleys. And there are paths into beauties of God that are less intellectual. I would not dare to claim that those who do this sort of climbing always see or savor more glory than those with wider eyes for the glory that is right there in the meadow.

Nevertheless, some of us are wired to make this climb. There is not much choice in it. We should no more boast about doing it than one should boast about being a morning person. Almost every time we open our Bibles, we see challenges. Puzzles. Mysteries. Paradoxes. Mountain paths beckon us, but seem to lead in opposite directions. We move toward these paths like bumblebees toward morning glories.

So if you are like me in this way, I would like to invite you to take a climb. I don't claim to be superior, but it may be that on this mountain I've gone up and down enough times to be of some help. There are clouds. It can get really murky on the way to the brightness on the other side. I would like to help if I can.

The paths that beckon us on this mountain are the path of God's election and the path of God's will for all people to be saved. Election seems to say that God has a people who are his, and he sees to it that they come to Christ and are saved. But the other path seems to say that God loves everyone and invites everyone to come, and wants them all to be saved.

On the mountain path of election, Jesus says: "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word" (John 17:6). And in another place, he says, "No one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father" (John 6:65). Or, as God says in Romans 9:15, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." Then Paul draws out the inference: "So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy" (v. 16).

But on the mountain path of God's desire for all, Jesus says to the city that is about to kill him: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" (Luke 13:34). And he offers an open and free invitation to everyone who is heavy laden, thirsty, and perishing: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28); "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37); "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

It's an old paradox. I didn't climb this mountain by myself.

More seasoned climbers than I helped me along the way. I'll introduce them to you as we go.

The aim of the climb is not intellectual satisfaction. The aim is worship. God gets more honor when we worship on the basis of what we know about him than he gets if we worship on the basis of what we don't know. If our effort to know God more clearly is not an effort to love him more dearly, it will be fatal. "Knowledge' puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Cor. 8:1). This means that the only knowledge worth having in the end is knowledge that leads to love—love for God and love for people.

This leads to a second aim of this climb: missions and ministry. The aim of knowing is loving people—all the peoples of the world and all the people in the neighborhood. If we are confused about God's election and God's universal invitation to salvation, we will not love the world as we ought.

These are dangerous and difficult days in world missions. Hundreds of unreached peoples that Jesus commands us to evangelize belong to religions and cultures that do not want us to come to them. But Jesus did not say, "Go make disciples where you are wanted." He said, "I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves" (Luke 10:3). Without a clear, strong conviction about God's saving will for these peoples, we will not have the resolve to go.

The same is true of our neighborhoods, near as well as far. There is suburban misery no money can heal. The brokenness may be hidden, but it is real. The rich are perishing. Most of them do not want us to tell them all is not well.

And in the ever-multiplying poor urban centers of the world, the pain, brokenness, sickness, dysfunction, hopelessness, and rage seem to be resistant to every kind of remedy. But Christians lean toward need, not comfort. At least we should. And the aim of this book is to bring such clarity to the will of God for ourselves and

for the lost that we will not waver in moving toward need with the gospel of Christ.

God is sending us—all of us, in one way or another—to the world. We are not our own. We were bought with a price. We belong to Christ. His design for the world is our destiny. We have an inestimable treasure for the world—the gospel of Jesus Christ. We do not deserve it any more than they do. That God has chosen us to know him and love him makes us debtors to every person. If this book succeeds in helping you make it through the clouds of confusion to the light of God’s glorious saving will, the evidence will be that you give yourself as never before to spreading this news:

Come, everyone who thirsts,  
    come to the waters;  
and he who has no money,  
    come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
    without money and without price. (Isa. 55:1)

We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.  
(2 Cor. 5:20)



# My Aim

My aim in this short book is to show from Scripture that the simultaneous existence of God's will for all people to be saved and his will to choose some people for salvation unconditionally before creation<sup>1</sup> is not a sign of divine schizophrenia or exegetical confusion. A corresponding aim is to show that unconditional election therefore does not contradict biblical expressions of God's compassion for all people and does not rule out sincere offers of salvation to all who are lost among the peoples of the world.

## The Perplexing Texts

First Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9, Ezekiel 18:23, and Matthew 23:37 are the texts most commonly cited to show that God's will is for all people to be saved and none to be lost.

- In 1 Timothy 2:1–4, Paul says that the reason we should pray for kings and all in high positions is that this may bring about a quiet and peaceable life that “is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

---

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 22:14; John 6:37, 44, 65; 8:47; 10:26–29; Rom. 8:29–30; 9:6–23; 11:5–10; 1 Cor. 1:26–30; Eph. 1:4–5; 1 Thess. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; James 2:5.

## 14 Does God Desire All to Be Saved?

- In 2 Peter 3:8–9, the apostle says that the delay of the second coming of Christ is owing to the fact that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day: “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”
- In Ezekiel 18:23 and 32, the Lord speaks about his heart for the perishing: “Have I any pleasure<sup>2</sup> in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? . . . I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD; so turn, and live.”
- In Matthew 23:37, Jesus says: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”

It is possible that careful interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:4 would lead us to believe that God’s *desire for all people to be saved* does not refer to every individual person in the world, but rather to all *sorts* of people, since “all people” in verse 1 may well mean groups such as “kings and all who are in high positions” (v. 2).<sup>3</sup> It is also possible that the “you” in 2 Peter 3:9 (“the Lord is . . . patient toward *you*, not wishing that any should perish”) refers not to every person in the world but to professing Christians, among whom, as Adolf Schlatter says, “are people who only through repentance can attain to the grace of God and to the promised inheritance.”<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>The emphatic doubling of the infinitive absolute with the finite verb for “have pleasure” is another way of expressing the oath in Ezekiel 33:11: “As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.” The intensification in the King James Version wording of Ezekiel 18:23, “Have I any pleasure *at all* that the wicked should die?” is not necessarily implied in the original Hebrew. The intensification of God’s denial of *having pleasure* is to stress that he absolutely means what he says, not that the absence of every possible form of pleasure is absolute—as we will see later in the book.

<sup>3</sup>John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (1735–1738; repr., London: W. H. Collingridge, 1855), 49–52.

<sup>4</sup>Adolf Schlatter, *Die Briefe des Petrus, Judas, Jakobus, der Brief an die Hebraeer, Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 9 (Stuttgart: Calver Verlag, 1964), 126. This is especially true in view of v. 15, which urges the readers themselves to “count the patience of our Lord as salvation,” and in view

Nevertheless, the case for this limitation on God's universal saving will has never been convincing to Arminians.<sup>5</sup> And for our purposes, this case is not decisive, since other texts are more compelling. Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11; and Matthew 23:37 surely point to God's desire that all people be saved. Therefore, as a hearty believer in unconditional, individual election, I also rejoice to affirm that there is a real sense in which God does not take pleasure in the perishing of the impenitent, that he desired to gather all the rebellious inhabitants of Jerusalem, and that he has compassion on all people. My aim is to show that this is not double talk.

My purpose is not to defend the doctrine that God chooses unconditionally whom he will save. I have tried to do that elsewhere,<sup>6</sup> and others have done it more extensively than I.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, I will try to make a credible case that while the texts cited above may indeed be pillars for God's universal love and universal saving desire, they are not weapens against unconditional election.

---

of the fact that the delay of the second coming seems to result not in more individuals being saved worldwide, but in more being lost as the love of many grows cold (Matt. 24:12).

<sup>5</sup> Arminians have their name from Jacobus Arminius, who lived from 1560 to 1609. Their theology is usually contrasted with Reformed theology (or Calvinism) within the larger evangelical camp. With the Reformed, Arminians believe that humanity is fallen and unable to save itself. God must give prevenient grace to make us able to believe. But unlike the Reformed, Arminians do not believe that this prevenient grace is *decisive* in bringing about personal salvation, but rather that humans have the power of decisive self-determination, and that is what finally determines who is saved and who is not. Another doctrinal distinctive is summed up in *The Global Dictionary of Theology*: "For Arminius, predestination, instead of being unconditionally founded in God's will alone, is conditional on an individual's faith. God elects those to salvation who do not resist, but accept, his gracious gift of faith and perseverance; God reprobates those who stubbornly refuse to receive his saving gift." Thus, persevering to the end in faith and being saved is not certain. Christians can use their power of self-determination to reject the faith and lose their salvation (K. D. Stanglin, "Arminianism," in *The Global Dictionary of Theology*, ed. William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008], 61. See Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006]).

<sup>6</sup> See especially *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God*, 3rd ed. (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2012), 33–59, 105–39; "How does a Sovereign God Love?" *Reformed Journal* 33, no. 4 (April 1983), 9–13; "Universalism in Romans 9–11? Testing the Exegesis of Thomas Talbott," *Reformed Journal* 33, no. 7 (July 1983), 1114.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Schreiner, "Does Romans 9 Teach Individual Election unto Salvation?" in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 89–106; Robert W. Yarborough, "Divine Election in the Gospel of John," in *Still Sovereign*, 47–62; Donald J. Westblade, "Divine Election in the Pauline Literature," in *Still Sovereign*, 63–88; Samuel Storms, *Chosen for Life: The Case for Divine Election* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007); R. C. Sproul, *Chosen by God: Knowing God's Perfect Plan for His Glory and His Children* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2010).

### Naming the Ways God Wills

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.

This distinction in the ways God wills is not a new contrivance. It has been expressed in various ways throughout the centuries. For example, theologians have spoken of “sovereign will” and “moral will,” “efficient will” and “permissive will,” “secret will” and “revealed will,” “will of decree” and “will of command,” “decretive will” and “preceptive will,” and “*voluntas signi* (will of sign)” and “*voluntas beneplaciti* (will of good pleasure),” among other terms.<sup>8</sup>

### Criticism of the Two Wills in God

Clark Pinnock referred disapprovingly to “the exceedingly paradoxical notion of two divine wills regarding salvation.”<sup>9</sup> In Pinnock’s edited volume, *A Case for Arminianism*, Randall G. Basinger argues that “if God has decreed all events, then it must be that things *cannot* and *should* not be any different from what they are.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, he rejects the notion that God could decree that a thing be one way and yet teach that we should act to make it another way. He says that it is too hard “to coherently conceive of a God in which this distinction really exists.”<sup>11</sup>

In the same volume, Fritz Guy argues that the revelation of God in Christ has brought about a “paradigm shift” in the way we should think about the love of God—namely, as “more funda-

<sup>8</sup>See Heinrich Hepppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (1860; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 143–49 for the way the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theologians talked about the relationship between God’s decrees and his moral law.

<sup>9</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, *Grace Unlimited* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1975), 13.

<sup>10</sup>Randall G. Basinger, “Exhaustive Divine Sovereignty: A Practical Critique,” in *A Case for Arminianism: The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, gen. ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 196 (emphasis in original).

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 203.

mental than, and prior to, justice and power.” This shift, he says, makes it possible to think about the “will of God” as “delighting more than deciding.” God’s will is not his sovereign purpose that he infallibly establishes, but rather “the desire of the lover for the beloved.” The will of God is his general intention and longing, not his effective purpose. Guy goes so far as to say, “Apart from a predestinarian presupposition, it becomes apparent that God’s ‘will’ is always to be understood in terms of intention and desire [as opposed to efficacious, sovereign purpose].”<sup>12</sup>

These criticisms are not new. Jonathan Edwards wrote two hundred and fifty years ago: “The Arminians ridicule the distinction between the secret and revealed will of God, or, more properly expressed, the distinction between the decree and the law of God; because we say he may decree one thing, and command another. And so, they argue, we hold a contrariety in God, as if one will of his contradicted another.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Driven by Texts, Not Logic**

But in spite of these criticisms, the distinction stands, not because of a logical or theological deduction or necessity, but because it is inescapable in the Scriptures. The most careful exegete writing in Pinnock’s *A Case for Arminianism* concedes the existence of two wills in God. I. Howard Marshall applies his exegetical gift to the Pastoral Epistles. Concerning 1 Timothy 2:4, he says:

To avoid all misconceptions it should be made clear at the outset that the fact that God wishes or wills that all people should be saved does not necessarily imply that all will respond to the

<sup>12</sup>Fritz Guy, “The Universality of God’s Love,” in *A Case for Arminianism*, 35.

<sup>13</sup>Jonathan Edwards, “Concerning the Decrees in General, and Election in Particular,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 526. Of course, the theological distinction between two kinds of willing in God goes back much further. In the fourth part of his book *The Cause of God and Truth* (see note 3), John Gill gives one hundred double-columned pages of references from the early fathers (from Clement to Jerome) concerning this and other “Reformed” distinctives.

## 18 Does God Desire All to Be Saved?

gospel and be saved. *We must certainly distinguish between what God would like to see happen and what he actually does will to happen, and both of these things can be spoken of as God's will.* The question at issue is not whether all will be saved but whether God has made provision in Christ for the salvation of all, provided that they believe, and without limiting the potential scope of the death of Christ merely to those whom God knows will believe.<sup>14</sup>

In this book, I would like to undergird Marshall's point that "we must certainly distinguish between what God would like to see happen and what he actually does will to happen, and [that] both of these things can be spoken of as God's will." Perhaps the most effective way to do this is to begin by drawing attention to the way Scripture portrays God's willing something in one sense that he disapproves in another sense. Then, after seeing some of the biblical evidence, we can step back and ponder how to understand it in relation to God's saving purposes.

---

<sup>14</sup>I. Howard Marshall, "Universal Grace and Atonement in the Pastoral Epistles," in *A Case for Arminianism*, 56 (emphasis added). One of the serious weaknesses of the argument in Marshall's chapter is the omission of any discussion or even mention of 2 Timothy 2:24–26, which says: "The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. *God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth*, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will." Marshall asks whether any text in the Pastorals would lead us to believe that "faith and repentance are the gifts of God, who gives them only to the previously chosen group of the elect" (66). He concludes that there is not, even though he passes over the text that comes closest to saying this very thing (2 Tim. 2:25). The text is even more significant because its wording is used in 1 Timothy 2:4. Compare the desire of God for people to "be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4) with the gift of God that people repent, "leading to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 2:25). These two texts alone probably teach that there are "two wills" in God: the will that all be saved and the will to give repentance to some.

# Illustrations of Two Wills in God

The simple purpose of this chapter is to assemble biblical illustrations of God's two wills. What passages of Scripture portray God as willing something in one sense that he disapproves in another sense? We will focus on five biblical examples.

## 1. The Death of Christ

The most compelling example of God's willing for sin to come to pass while at the same time disapproving the sin is his willing the death of his perfect, divine Son. The betrayal of Jesus by Judas was a morally evil act inspired immediately by Satan (Luke 22:3). Yet, in Acts 2:23, Peter says, "This Jesus [*was*] *delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.*" The betrayal was sin, and it involved the instrumentality of Satan, but it was part of God's ordained plan. That is, there is a sense in which God willed the delivering up of his Son, even though Judas's act was sin.

Moreover, Herod's contempt for Jesus (Luke 23:11), the Jews' cry, "Crucify, crucify him!" (v. 21), Pilate's spineless expediency (v. 24), and the Gentile soldiers' mockery (v. 36) were also sinful attitudes and deeds. Yet in Acts 4:27–28, Luke expresses his under-

standing of the sovereignty of God in these acts by recording the prayer of the Jerusalem saints:

Truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do *whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.*

Herod, the Jewish crowds, Pilate, and the soldiers lifted their hands to rebel against the Most High, only to find that their rebellion was, in fact, unwitting (sinful) service in the inscrutable designs of God.

The appalling death of Christ was the will and work of God the Father. Isaiah writes, “We esteemed him stricken, *smitten by God*. . . . *It was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief*” (Isa. 53:4, 10). God’s will was very much engaged in the events that brought his Son to death on the cross. God considered it “fitting . . . [to] make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering” (Heb. 2:10). Yet, as Jonathan Edwards points out, Christ’s suffering “could not come to pass but by sin. For contempt and disgrace was one thing he was to suffer.”<sup>1</sup>

It goes almost without saying that God wills obedience to his moral law, and that he wills this in a way that can be rejected by many. This is evident from numerous texts: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does *the will of my Father* who is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21); “Whoever does *the will of my Father* in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (12:50); “Whoever does *the will of God* abides forever” (1 John 2:17). “The will of God” in these texts is the revealed, moral instruction of the Old and New Testaments, which forbids sin.

<sup>1</sup>Jonathan Edwards, “Concerning the Decrees in General, and Election in Particular,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 534.



Therefore, we know it was *not* the “will of God” that Judas, Herod, the Jewish crowds, Pilate, and the Gentile soldiers disobeyed the moral law of God by sinning in delivering Jesus up to be crucified. But we also know that it *was* the will of God that this should come to pass. Therefore, we know that God wills in one sense what he does not will in another sense. I. Howard Marshall’s statement, quoted in chapter 1, is confirmed by the death of Jesus: “We must certainly distinguish between what God would like to see happen and what he actually does will to happen.”<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The War against the Lamb

There are two reasons that we turn next to the book of Revelation. One is that the war against the Son of God, which reached its sinful climax at the cross, comes to final consummation in a way that confirms what we have seen about the will of God. The other reason is that this text reveals John’s understanding of God’s active involvement in fulfilling prophecies in ways that involve sinning. John sees a vision of some final events of history:

And the ten horns that you saw, they and the beast will hate the prostitute. They will make her desolate and naked, and devour her flesh and burn her up with fire, for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. (Rev. 17:16–17)

Even without going into all the details of this passage, the relevant matter is clear. The beast rises from “the bottomless pit” (Rev. 17:8). He is the personification of evil and rebellion against God. The ten horns are ten kings (v. 12), and they “make war on the Lamb” (v. 14).

---

<sup>2</sup>I. Howard Marshall, “Universal Grace and Atonement in the Pastoral Epistles,” in *A Case for Arminianism: The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, gen. ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 56.

## 22 Does God Desire All to Be Saved?

Waging war against the Lamb is sin, and sin is contrary to the will of God. Nevertheless, the angel says (literally), “God has put it into their [the ten kings’] hearts *to carry out his purpose* by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled” (v. 17). Therefore, God wills (in one sense) to influence the hearts of the ten kings so that they will do what is against his will (in another sense).

Moreover, God does this in fulfillment of prophetic words. The ten kings will collaborate with the beast “until the words of God are fulfilled.” This implies something crucial about John’s understanding of the fulfillment of “the prophecies leading up to the overthrow of Antichrist.”<sup>3</sup> It implies that (at least in John’s view) God’s prophecies are not mere predictions about what God knows will happen, but rather are divine intentions that he makes sure will happen. We know this because verse 17 says that *God is acting* to see to it that the ten kings will make league with the beast “until the words of God are fulfilled.” John is not exulting in the marvelous foreknowledge of God to predict a bad event. Rather, he is exulting in the marvelous sovereignty of God to make sure that the bad event comes about. Fulfilled prophecy, in John’s mind, is not only prediction, but also promised divine performance.

This is important because John tells us in his Gospel that there are Old Testament prophecies of events surrounding the death of Christ that involve sin. This means that God intends to bring about events that involve things he forbids. These events include Judas’s betrayal of Jesus (John 13:18; Ps. 41:9), the hatred Jesus received from his enemies (John 15:25; Pss. 69:4; 35:19), the casting of lots for Jesus’s clothing (John 19:24; Ps. 22:18), and the piercing of Jesus’s side (John 19:36–37; Ex. 12:46; Ps. 34:20; Zech. 12:10). John expresses his theology of God’s sovereignty with these words: “These things took place *that* the Scripture might be fulfilled”

---

<sup>3</sup>Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 320. Mounce is following Isbon Beckwith, *The Apocalypse of John* (1919; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 703.

(John 19:36). In other words, the events were not a coincidence that God merely foresaw, but a plan that God *purposed* to bring about.<sup>4</sup> Thus, again we find Marshall's words confirmed: "We must certainly distinguish between what God would like to see happen and what he actually does will to happen."

### 3. The Hardening Work of God

Another evidence that demonstrates God's willing (in one sense) a state of affairs that he disapproves (in another sense) is the testimony of Scripture that God wills to harden some men's hearts so that they become obstinate in sinful behavior that he disapproves.

The best-known example is the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.<sup>5</sup> In Exodus 8:1, the Lord says to Moses, "Go in to Pharaoh and say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Let my people go, that they may serve me."'" In other words, God's command, that is, his *will*, was that Pharaoh let the Israelites go. Nevertheless, from the start he also willed that Pharaoh *not* let the Israelites go. In Exodus 4:21, God says to Moses: "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But *I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go.*" At one point, Pharaoh himself acknowledges that his unwillingness to let the people go is sin: "Now therefore, forgive my sin" (Ex. 10:17). Thus, we see that God commanded that Pharaoh do a thing that God himself willed not to allow. The good thing that God commanded he prevented. And the thing he brought about involved sin.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>"Characteristically John sees a fulfillment of Scripture in these happenings. The purpose of God had to be fulfilled. . . . Note the significance of the *hina* ['that']" (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 822).

<sup>5</sup>For a detailed study of the hardening texts in Exodus, see John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 139–62. The relevant texts are Exodus 4:21; 7:3, 13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 12, 34, 35; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 13:15; 14:4, 8, 17. Cf. G. K. Beale, "An Exegetical and Theological Consideration of the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4–14 and Romans 9," *Trinity Journal* 5 (1984), 129–54.

<sup>6</sup>This is illustrated also in the way the Lord worked so that the Egyptians hated his people, and then worked again so that the Israelites found favor with the Egyptians. Psalm 105:25: "[God] turned their

# Are There Two Wills in God?

In this short theological essay, John Piper builds a scriptural case that God's unconditional election unto salvation is compatible with his genuine desire and offer for all to be saved. Helping us to make sense of this seemingly paradoxical relationship, Piper wisely holds both truths in tension as he explores the Bible's teaching on this challenging topic, graciously responds to those who disagree, and motivates us to passionately proclaim the free offer of the gospel to all people.

---

*That God has chosen us to know him and love him makes us debtors to every person. If this book succeeds in helping you make it through the clouds of confusion to the light of God's glorious saving will, the evidence will be that you give yourself as never before to spreading this news:*

*Come, everyone who thirsts,  
come to the waters;  
and he who has no money,  
come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
without money and without price. (Isa. 55:1)*

*We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.  
(2 Cor. 5:20)*

—From the Introduction

---

**John Piper** (DTheol, University of Munich) is teacher and founder of [desiringGod.org](http://desiringGod.org) and chancellor of Bethlehem College and Seminary. He served for 33 years as senior pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis and is author of more than 50 books.