

Why John Piper's Doctrine of Salvation Is Incompatible with Scripture

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Abstract

This thesis details and responds to a biblical contradiction created by John Piper's soteriology. The contradiction is characterized by God's operation in salvation according to Piper and the biblical doctrine of God's nature. The Christian God and the inerrancy of the Bible are presupposed.

An argument is posed showing the contradiction using Scripture and Piper's soteriology. Conclusions made are (1) that Scripture implicitly teaches that all people possess the free will to choose whether to have faith in Christ and repent, (2) no person possesses the ability to save himself, (3) faith in Christ and repentance are the only two things required of the human response for salvation, (4) faith and repentance are distinct from good works, and (5) God alone saves.

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Background for the Thesis

This thesis will assume the existence of the Christian God, the same God that John Piper believes in. It will also assume the inerrancy of the Bible since it is a response to Piper, a pastor who believes the Bible is God's Word and inerrant.¹ Since this thesis is tackling a philosophical problem with John Piper's doctrine of salvation (soteriology), the air should be cleared concerning the relationship between philosophy and theology. In his work *Does God Desire All to Be Saved?* Piper makes a distinction between Scripture and logic in the intention of showing that he trusts Scripture over a priori reason.² I think that logic is not inherently against Scripture, as I would hope Piper also believes. I think that when used properly, logic proves Scripture. If Scripture really is the Word of God and inerrant, and God is omniscient with logic itself reflecting His reason, then Scripture ought not to have any logical contradictions in it. If any were found and proven to be contradictions, then the inerrancy of Scripture might be brought into question. In the same work, Piper later presents his belief that philosophical presuppositions, made prior to reading the Bible, ought not to be read into Scripture.³ I agree with this belief, and therefore I need to specify that this thesis is not imposing any philosophical presuppositions apart from the aforementioned two: the God of Israel is the only living God, and Scripture is His divinely revealed Word.

¹ John Piper, *TULIP (A Study Guide to the DVD Featuring John Piper): The Pursuit of God's Glory in Salvation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 2009, 3.

² John Piper, *Does God Desire all to be Saved?* (Wheaton: Crossway), 2013, 17.

³ *Ibid.*, 40-41 & 56.

Another important point to address is the reason for this thesis. Though Piper is a fellow follower of Christ Jesus, this thesis is a critique of an aspect of his theology. This critique is not intended to promote discord for the sake of a simple disagreement, and it is surely not meant to encourage meaningless debates as are denounced in 2 Timothy 2:23 and Titus 3:9. Rather, this thesis is encouraging the use of logic and reason with Scripture to better understand its teachings. God is a God of reason and logic. Paul used the contemporary philosophies of his time to show Christian truths in Acts 17, and Scripture teaches throughout its wisdom literature and in other places for believers to use good judgment for practical reasons and to test certain things against Scripture as in 2 Thessalonians 5:20-21. Reason is perhaps the only tool people possess with which to test prophecies against Scripture. Reading false presuppositions into the text will always wrongfully distort the true meaning, so it is the job of the reader to check his own presuppositions and make sure they are also Scripturally based. The reason for this thesis, then, is to encourage fellow believers to study Scripture with the intention of understanding it properly, as God intended. "For God is not a God of confusion but of peace."⁴ Therefore, if any exegesis of Scripture creates logical contradictions (confusion), it is best to conclude human error was made in the exegesis. To Piper, this is a humble encouragement to check his presuppositions against the Scriptures. If I am found to be wrong after that, then I would be glad to correct myself, only if the authority by which I do so is what Scripture says.

Introduction to the Argument

The contents of this philosophical critique are regarding a specific presupposition concerning the nature of humankind that Piper holds that seems to affect the rest of his theology.

⁴ 2 Cor. 14:33a, ESV.

The argument I will be presenting shortly details a logical contradiction that is created on account of Piper's presupposition that appears in his soteriology. This contradiction is a major issue, if my argument proves sound, since it dislodges a fundamental teaching in Scripture concerning the nature of God: His goodness.

The argument utilizes nothing but Piper's beliefs about Scripture that he has written on in his various works and their logical implications that are unavoidable. Note that all italicized terms will be clearly defined, and all points will be properly expounded upon in the deconstruction of the argument. The fifteen-point argument is as follows:

1. God is *Good*.⁵
2. God is *Just*.⁶
3. Salvation is an action performed by God.
4. Therefore, when God saves, the action is Just.
5. Faith in Jesus Christ, according to Scripture, is required for a person to receive salvation.
6. According to Piper, a person does not have faith in Jesus Christ until after God causes that person to have faith.
7. Repentance, according to Scripture, is required for a person to receive salvation.
8. According to Piper, a person does not repent until after God causes that person to be able to repent.

⁵ For a temporary definition of *Good*, here, until later expounded upon, this does not refer to God's moral goodness so much as His integrity, to act according to how He describes Himself in Scripture.

⁶ Temporarily, *Just* can be understood as acting only in ways that are morally justified. Just and Good are capitalized for their nuance in this thesis.

9. Faith and repentance, according to Scripture, are the only two requirements of a person for salvation by the atoning work of Christ on the cross.
10. Therefore, according to Piper, God causes a person to receive salvation directly, without any preceding input from that person.
11. Therefore, according to Piper, salvation is something God efficaciously *prompts* a person to obtain, volition on the part of the person being irrelevant.
12. Scripture describes God as desiring that every person obtain salvation.
13. It is not the case that every person obtains—or will obtain—salvation.
14. Therefore, God acts in a way that is contrary to how He is described in Scripture since not every person obtains—or will obtain—salvation and it would be Just for God to efficaciously prompt every person to obtain salvation.
15. Therefore, according to John Piper's soteriology, God cannot be Good.

And with this conclusion in point 15, unless a proper defeater is proposed, either the doctrine of salvation as currently understood by Piper ought to be changed to align with the fundamental Scriptural teaching that God is Good, or it must be admitted that Scripture is not inerrant, since it contains false information about the nature of God. I do not believe Piper would admit to the errancy of Scripture, as I would also never dare to do, so I encourage him to check this argument against Scripture alone, searching for the truth. To change his soteriology to properly account for God's goodness, it may be the case that a presupposition concerning the nature of humankind ought to be reconsidered. This presupposition will be addressed extensively later.

Deconstruction of the Argument

Point One: God is Good

Good, as well as Just to follow, is capitalized for clarification so that it will not be confused for the conventional use of the term *good* to refer to moral goodness. What is meant by *Good* is that God does not act in a way that is contrary to how He is described in Scripture.⁷ His Good-ness also denotes that He will act in accordance with Scripture (e.g.: He will fulfill His promises).⁸

Piper agrees with this understanding of God. It basically comes down to his belief that Scripture is inerrant. In *Desiring God*, Piper writes, "There is only one rock: the Word of God."⁹ Piper does his best to base all he teaches on Scripture first, leaving man-made philosophies that do not reflect God's truth aside. This definition of Good is not a question of omnipotence. *Could* God act in a way contrary to Scripture? This question is irrelevant because both Piper and I affirm God's moral goodness, and the ninth commandment is "Do not give false testimony against your neighbor."¹⁰ God's testimony to people is His Word, which says He "does not change like shifting shadows."¹¹

Point Two: God is Just

Just denotes moral justification. The standard for moral goodness is God's nature, and Scripture being God's Word details His moral law very well. If any action demands a specific

⁷ Lk. 18:19, Jas. 1:17.

⁸ Num. 23:19.

⁹ John Piper, *Desiring God*, Sisters, OR.: Multnomah, 2003, 28.

¹⁰ Ex. 20:16, CSB throughout.

¹¹ Jas. 1:17.

moral justification for its doing, then for that act to be done Justly, the corresponding moral justification must be met. God being Just means that He acts according to this reasoning. When God does something, He does it having the moral justification for its doing met. This requirement of a moral justification for every action is not a limitation on the ability of God, but rather a description of His nature as defined in Scripture.¹²

Piper affirms that God sent Christ to die on the cross in order “to satisfy the demands of His justice without condemning the whole human race.”¹³ According to the definition of Just, Piper agrees that God acts only in a way that is Just, or else God would not need to have Christ die at all to save sinners. Again, this is not a limitation on God’s omnipotence. Rather, it is a glorification of His omniscience, since He knows far better than people that “the wages of sin is death” and “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”¹⁴ This teaching is true by virtue of it aligning with God’s morally good nature, the standard for morality itself.

Point Three: Salvation is an Action Performed by God

Piper affirms the exclusivity of salvation by being through Christ alone.¹⁵ He also affirms God’s unconditional double election of people for salvation and for damnation.^{16,17} Though the distinction between Piper’s soteriology and the view of this thesis may appear able to be summed

¹² Ps. 7:11.

¹³ Piper, *Desiring God*, 61.

¹⁴ Rm. 6:23, Hb. 9:22.

¹⁵ Piper, *Desiring God*, 53.

¹⁶ Piper, *Does God Desire all to be Saved?*, 15 & 47.

¹⁷ This idea of double election, that God predestines some for heaven and the rest of humanity for hell, was held by John Calvin, who said, “salvation is freely offered to some while others are barred from access to it.” Alister E. McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader*, Twenty-fifth anniversary fifth edition (Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell), 2017, 369.

up in the least number of words by saying “Calvinism vs. Arminianism,” this simplification is simply untrue. I am not a Calvinist, but neither am I Arminian. Unfortunate as it may be to have to identify with a specific sect within the Church, the view that most accurately aligns with the alternative soteriology I will be presenting later in this thesis is known as the Traditional Southern Baptist view.¹⁸ According to this view, like Piper, it is affirmed that according to Scripture it is God and God alone who saves. A straw man is often presented by Calvinist apologists that the idea that faith in Christ being left to the decision of a person makes the person, not Jesus, the ultimate deciding factor in salvation, and therefore a self-savior, which is simply not the case biblically.¹⁹ The strawman ignores how clear Scripture is to make distinct the good works that legalists wrongly think can earn them salvation and the faith in Christ that is the only thing required for salvation (understanding the harmony of biblical faith and repentance of course, to be discussed later).²⁰ Faith being left to the volitional decision of a human does not make that person a self-savior since it is not a good work; it does not *merit* salvation. Once a person chooses to have faith in Christ, salvation itself only happens by God’s grace. In other words, it is God’s choice to save those who have faith, and He promises to save all who have faith in Christ. To be discussed later, I will argue for a different order than what Piper says of which comes first in salvation: faith or regeneration.

¹⁸ David Lewis Allen, Eric Hankins, and Adam Harwood, *Anyone can be Saved: A Defense of "Traditional" Southern Baptist Soteriology* (Eugene, Oregon: WIPF & Stock), 2016, 19-23.

¹⁹ R. C. Sproul, *What is Reformed Theology?: Understanding the Basics*, Special ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books), 2012, 88.

²⁰ Ep. 2:8-9, Jas. 2:14.

Point Four: Therefore, When God Saves, the Action Is Just

What is meant by this point is that since it is granted that God is Good—not ever acting contrary to how He is described in Scripture—and Scripture describes God as Just, He therefore will not ever act in a way that is not Just. This means that any action God performs, therefore, whether perceived by people or not, has a justification behind it, and is therefore justified morally (e.g.: God does not sin). Concerning salvation, the justification for God's saving of persons is the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and His resurrection.

For clarification, this point is not saying that no matter what God hypothetically does, it will be justified by virtue of Him being omnipotent. The argument against divine command theory that God could have hypothetically commanded currently understood evils to be good things is avoided by an essentialist understanding of God, taking into account a key detail of the nature of the Christian God. He is not bound by an objective moral code that is separate from or above Him, nor is He a completely arbitrary being of a fickle nature. Rather, God is good in His very nature and, therefore, would not command certain evils to be good because the standard for what is good is Himself, and being omniscient, He knows exactly what evil is.

Point Five: Faith in Jesus Christ, According to Scripture, Is Required for a Person to Receive Salvation

Piper defines the kind of faith required for salvation (the faith described in Scripture, and for reference in this thesis dubbed *saving faith*) as “trusting in Christ alone for salvation.”²¹ Piper is careful not to separate saving faith from repentance.²² These two go hand in hand in Scripture

²¹ Piper, *Desiring God*, 64.

²² *Ibid.*

when referencing the only requirements of a person to inherit God's gift of salvation. Though from some Scripture, it may seem that mere belief in the deity of Christ is all that is required for salvation ("If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is LORD,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved,"²³ "everyone who believes in [Christ] will not perish but have eternal life"),²⁴ James 2:19b says, "Even the demons believe and they shudder." The common use of the word "believe" is too simplistic to represent the biblical use of faith in reference to the faith in Christ that results in salvation. The point made here in James is that even demons, who are obviously opposed to the will of Christ, believe that Christ is the LORD and know that He will prevail in the end. Piper also makes this distinction from Scripture, differentiating between mere belief and saving faith. "It is not merely agreement with the truth of a doctrine."²⁵ Saving faith in Scripture demands a repentant heart. In other words, the belief that accepts Christ's salvation is one that entails a genuine heart of repentance. When Scripture says, "believe on" or "believe in Him," the Greek word *pisteuó* refers to putting trust in Christ. That includes trusting all His teachings and commands and accordingly the Scriptures as they are what Christ claimed to teach.²⁶ One of Jesus' consistent commands was to repent and follow Him for salvation, so to trust in Christ would entail repentance and following Him.²⁷ Repentance will be defined in point seven.

²³ Rm. 10:9.

²⁴ Jn. 3:16.

²⁵ Piper, *Desiring God*, 64.

²⁶ Mt. 5:17.

²⁷ Mt. 4:17.

Point Six: According to Piper, a Person Does Not Have Faith in Jesus Christ Until After God Causes That Person to Have Faith

Piper may not directly say that God *causes* people to have faith. Rather, he goes so far as to say, “Conversion does indeed include an act of will by which we renounce sin and submit ourselves to the authority of Christ and put our hope and trust in Him. We are responsible to do this and will be condemned if we don’t.”²⁸ It seems at the outset that point six is a misrepresentation of Piper’s soteriology. However, just after the previous quote, he goes on to say, “But just as clearly, the Bible teaches that, owing to our hard heart and willful blindness and spiritual insensitivity, we cannot do this.”²⁹ According to the belief of total depravity that Piper espouses, humans are so spiritually corrupted by their sin nature that they do not possess the ability to have faith in Christ. Piper understands the biblical teaching of spiritual deadness to extend to cognitive ability, that when someone is spiritually dead, he cannot assent to faith in God.³⁰ Piper equates spiritual deadness with the biblical idea of the hardness of the heart.³¹ *Regeneration*, the biblical teaching of being “born again,” is described by Piper as the softening of the human heart.^{32,33} Piper quotes verses from the Old Testament referencing God’s giving Israel a new heart or replacing their hearts of stone with hearts of flesh as representing the

²⁸ Piper, *Desiring God*, 65.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

³¹ The biblical teaching of heart’s *hardening* refers to the gradual process of people who continually reject God’s truth and live sinfully with unrepentant hearts (i.e., “suppress the truth in unrighteousness,” Rm. 1:18). People are not born with their hearts fully hardened, but Piper believes that they are. John Piper, *Providence* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 2020, 526.

³² Piper, *Desiring God*, 65.

³³ Jn. 3:3.

doctrine of regeneration.³⁴ According to Piper, this act of regeneration that God performs on people's hearts enables them to have faith in Him, *and* after God regenerates a person's heart, faith *necessarily* follows. Take this quotation from Piper for consideration:

We declare three things as the foundation for the universal offer of the love of God and the salvation of Christ to everyone in the world: (1) Christ really is the all-powerful, all-wise, all-satisfying divine Son of God offered in the gospel; (2) by His death and resurrection, He has acted out God's discriminating, definite electing, regenerating, faith-creating, every-promise-guaranteeing new-covenant love, and thus has purchased and secured irreversibly for His elect everything needed to bring them from deadness in sin to everlasting, glorified life and joy in the presence of God; and (3) everyone, without any exception, who receives Christ as supreme treasure—who believes in His name—will be united to Christ in the embrace of this electing love, and enjoy Him and all His gifts forever.³⁵

Note his wording, "God's discriminating, definite electing, regenerating, faith-creating...love," and, "secured irreversibly for His elect everything needed to bring them from deadness in sin to everlasting, glorified life."³⁶ The gracious gift of salvation by God as defined in Scripture is taken by Piper to be composed of an unconditional election of certain people for salvation through God's regeneration of their hearts and consequential "faith-[creation]." Carefully consider the implications from his first two points he lists here on the third. If only the elect that God regenerates are going to be saved because without that regeneration, they *cannot* have faith,³⁷ then there is no point in saying that "everyone without any exception...who believes...will be united to Christ in the embrace of this electing love."³⁸ There is a clear

³⁴ Piper, *Desiring God*, 65-66.

³⁵ Piper, *Does God Desire all to be Saved?*, 54.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Piper, *Desiring God*, 65.

³⁸ Piper, *Does God Desire all to be Saved?*, 54.

condition beyond the human will that determines who will believe. If God does not regenerate someone, then he or she does not possess the ability to believe, and he or she never will. Though in Piper's view, technically speaking, whoever believes will be saved, he cannot avoid the dire exclusivity of who can believe with nice sounding words.

Piper's affirmation that the saving faith required for salvation includes an act of human volition is rendered completely unsubstantiated when considering the prerequisite for people gaining the ability to have faith *and* his reasoning that God's regeneration entails that faith will follow. God causing someone to have the ability to have faith in Him, and that faith being understood as irresistible, is no different than saying that God causes that person to have faith.³⁹ The key is in the definition of volitional choice. To choose something volitionally is to make a personal decision within one's own cognition to accept one thing as opposed to another. If having faith comes down to a volitional choice, then it must be understood that one could choose not to have faith concerning this volitional choice.⁴⁰ Yet the saving faith God requires is irresistible, according to Piper, so no one will or would ever choose otherwise if both given the choice and ability to make the choice. Foreknowledge of the decision someone would make

³⁹ In his work *Five Points: Towards a Deeper Experience of God's Grace* Piper affirms that once God regenerates a person's heart, faith in Him and repentance, according to His grace, is irresistible. Piper, *Five Points: Towards a Deeper Experience of God's Grace* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus), 2013, 25-26.

⁴⁰ Many arguments exist for a compatibilist framework of determinism and libertarian free will. These arguments attempt to join the actuality of both a fully determined universe, where God has predetermined how every single event in all of time will occur, and human libertarian free will, simply meaning that people do truly possess a capacity to freely choose between various options (of actions, thoughts, beliefs, etc.). Ultimately, however, all compatibilist arguments fail to avoid full determinism. They fail to incorporate a genuine libertarian free will because within all compatibilist frameworks, it is not the case that after having made a choice, any individual actually *could have* chosen otherwise. No one could choose otherwise because all were determined to not choose otherwise. Even if it was the case that someone did not choose otherwise because she did not *want* to choose otherwise, then that desire to not choose otherwise was determined. In compatibilism, there is no ultimate liberty originating within humans, so there is no genuine libertarian free will (the free will argued for in this thesis).

given these two things (the options and the ability to choose) is irrelevant to the discussion if *by definition* of the saving faith it cannot *not* be chosen. With this point, remember, all I am trying to assert is that Piper says God causes a person to have saving faith.

Point Seven: Repentance, According to Scripture, Is Required for a Person to Receive Salvation

Piper defines repentance as “turning from sin and unbelief.”⁴¹ He includes unbelief in this definition of repentance as also being rejected with sin. According to Piper faith and repentance “are really two sides of the same coin.”⁴² Faith and repentance are the only two things that Piper lists as required of a person in the act of conversion (basically salvation). He says, “Repentance and faith are our work.”⁴³ As I have shown Scripture references previously concerning belief or saving faith being required for salvation, there are also parts of Scripture that say to repent and leave out the belief side. In Acts 2:38, Peter says, “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” But here, faith in Jesus is implicit since those Peter was addressing were “pierced to the heart” by the Gospel that Peter had just preached in the previous verses. The people asked Peter what they should do, believing that Jesus could forgive them. “Who can forgive sins but God alone?”⁴⁴ So, I would agree with Piper that, according to Scripture, saving faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin in that without both together, salvation cannot happen.

⁴¹ Piper, *Desiring God*, 64.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁴ Mk. 2:7, Lk. 5:21.

Point eight only goes so far as to say that Piper claims repentance does not happen until after God enables one to repent. This is noticeably less strong than point six concerning faith—that God causes faith directly. However, since Piper and I both agree that faith and repentance go together in conversion, both equally requiring the other to mark a genuine faith or a genuine repentant heart, if God causes faith directly, then repentance is surely included in that efficacious act. Inversely, if faith is freely chosen, then repentance is as well.

Point Eight: According to Piper, a Person Does Not Repent Until After God Causes That Person to Be Able to Repent

In like fashion as saving faith, Piper espouses the belief that people do not possess the ability to repent apart from God's regeneration of their hearts. The same quotation from before: "Conversion does indeed include an act of will by which we renounce sin and submit ourselves to the authority of Christ...But...owing to our hard heart and willful blindness and spiritual insensitivity, we cannot do this."⁴⁵ This belief is found in the thought of St. Augustine which John Calvin espoused, dubbed Reformed Theology or Calvinism, that holds a view known as Total Depravity.⁴⁶ This term is finicky, as there are many different interpretations of its extent because it deals with the depravity of the human soul due to the Fall recorded in Genesis chapter three. All true Christians believe that sin confers upon all people a spiritually dead nature, yet

⁴⁵ Piper, *Desiring God*, 65.

⁴⁶ Daniel J. Treier, and Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Third ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group), 2017, 208 & 297.

Calvinists in general,⁴⁷ and Piper specifically, take it to extend to the ability to have faith in Christ and repent from sins.⁴⁸

Point Nine: Faith and Repentance, According to Scripture, Are the Only Two Requirements of a Person for Salvation by the Atoning Work of Christ on the Cross

Faith and repentance are not the only two things required for salvation to occur; they are simply the only two things required of a person for salvation by Jesus Christ. Hebrews 9:22b says, “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” So, the key element required for salvation, in accordance with the Just nature of God, is Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, His death and resurrection, since without the shedding of Christ’s blood, the perfect sacrifice, there could be no forgiveness of anyone’s sins. First Peter 3:18a says, “For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God.” Point nine is to make clear that faith and repentance are the only two things required of the human response to God’s gift of salvation. According to Piper, “Repentance and faith are our work... We are responsible to do this and will be condemned if we don’t.”⁴⁹ The only difference between his and my understanding is the temporal order by which repentance, faith, and regeneration come, which will be discussed later.

⁴⁷ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, NJ: The Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co.), 1932, Chapter X, Section 2.

⁴⁸ Piper, *Five Points*, 21.

⁴⁹ Piper, *Desiring God*, 65.

Point Ten: Therefore, According to Piper, God Causes a Person to Receive Salvation**Directly, Without any Preceding Input from That Person**

If the only two requirements of the human response to God's offering of the gift of salvation are faith and repentance, and faith and repentance are causally linked to God's regeneration of a person's heart (that person not being able to have either otherwise), then the only ultimate determining factor for anyone to receive salvation, and even to have faith or repent, is God's regenerative act.⁵⁰ Without God regenerating someone's heart and enabling that person to receive His gift, he or she would never receive it. And further, without His regeneration, he or she *could* never receive it. Scripture is clear that God is the only one who saves.⁵¹ Piper's soteriology, however, takes this doctrine of the Savior to an extreme. Not only is He the only one who saves, but God saves and does not save regardless of whether someone wants to be saved or not. From Piper's affirmation that he is "a hearty believer in unconditional, individual election," to be consistent, he must take this soteriology to an extreme.⁵² If God does not regenerate an individual, then that individual will never possess the ability to accept the gift of salvation. Therefore, it is because of God that anyone is not saved. All it takes for everyone to be saved, according to Piper's soteriology discussed so far, is for God to regenerate every person's heart.

⁵⁰ Charles Spurgeon, a staunch Calvinist, once said that God grants repentance to men in an effectual way, and this "makes men willing to be saved." Charles Spurgeon, *Spurgeon: New Park Street Pulpit: 347 Sermons from the Prince of Preachers* (BookBaby), 2012, 739.

⁵¹ Jn. 14:6, Mt. 7:13-14, Ep. 2:8-9.

⁵² Piper, *Does God Desire all to be Saved?*, 15.

Point Eleven: Therefore, According to Piper, Salvation is Something God Efficaciously***Prompts* a Person to Obtain, Volition on the Part of the Person Being Irrelevant**

Prompt here means to put within, to place, or impart salvation to or in a person. This may seem prima facie a misrepresentation of Piper's view, but again, even though Piper claims that human volition is involved in salvation, because it is God's action alone that causes anyone to have faith and be saved, human volition is rendered irrelevant in faith and repentance as requirements for salvation. Any appeal to volition in faith or repentance is irrelevant because that volition is characterized by a certain action that all people will take when given the ability. All people will have faith in Christ and repent of their sins if enabled by God to do so; therefore, it does not really matter if they do so volitionally, because those that are never enabled would also do the same if enabled. Take away the volition of the action, and the result remains unchanged.⁵³ Because volition is rendered irrelevant, the salvation obtained is solely due to God's action. Therefore, it is fundamentally no different to say that God solely causes people to be saved.

Point Twelve: Scripture Describes God as Desiring That Every Person Obtain Salvation

Piper agrees that God has a "universal saving desire," but distinguishes the desire of God from the sovereign will and moral will of God.⁵⁴ I agree with Piper concerning these distinctions. All that is meant by point twelve is that God would like to see all people come to the saving knowledge of the Gospel and accept God's gift of salvation in Christ Jesus. Quoting I. Howard Marshall, Piper says, "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

⁵³ Volition is rendered irrelevant in light of libertarian free will as defined in this thesis (see footnote 39).

⁵⁴ Piper, *Does God Desire all to be Saved?*, 13-18.

happen, and [that] both of these things can be spoken of as God's will.'"⁵⁵ I also agree with Marshall's and Piper's shared point here. In 2 Peter 3:9 it says, "The LORD does not delay His promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance." Some translations⁵⁶ say, "not willing that any should perish," but this word for willing/wanting is the Greek word *boulomai*, literally translating to "willing as an affection, to desire." Piper and I both affirm this.

Point Thirteen: It Is Not the Case That Every Person Obtains—or Will Obtain—Salvation

Piper places the reasoning for why some will be saved and not others on the unconditional election of God, so it is certain that Piper believes not all will be saved.⁵⁷ Scripture is clear that only a few, compared to the entire population of humanity for all time, will be saved. Matthew 7:14 says, "How narrow is the gate and difficult the road that leads to life, and few find it." Only Christians who espouse universalism would disagree with this point, and Piper is not one of them.

Point Fourteen: Therefore, God Acts in a Way That is Contrary to How He is Described in Scripture Since Not Every Person Obtains—or Will Obtain—Salvation and It Would Be Just for God to Efficaciously Prompt Every Person to Obtain Salvation

I have already shown that according to Piper, God is the sole deciding factor for whether a person will be saved or not. In Piper's soteriology, God enables a person to be able to have faith and repent, and, therefore, that person will have faith and repent because of that enabling.

⁵⁵ Piper, *Does God Desire all to be Saved?*, 18.

⁵⁶ Namely KJV and NKJV.

⁵⁷ Piper, *Does God Desire all to be Saved?*, 54.

This enabling is Just because of Christ's atoning work on the cross. The issue with this point is Piper's argument concerning God's split wills (the sovereign will and the desiring will).⁵⁸

According to Piper, there is not a contradiction in Scripture given that God both desires that all be saved and yet not all are saved.⁵⁹ His reasoning for this is that God may delight in the salvation of people, but at the same time He delights in the judgment of the wicked and is glorified by His justice being enacted through their condemnation.⁶⁰ God's sovereign will, then, according to Piper, decrees the salvation of some and the damnation of others, all for the glory and to the delight of God.⁶¹ What Piper seems to miss in this line of reasoning is that Scripture is clear that one is better than the other; salvation glorifies and delights God more than condemnation.

The first piece of evidence to this point is the biblical teaching that God desires all to be saved.⁶² I have shown that Piper agrees with this doctrine as biblical. If God desires something, it must be good, given that He is good (and God, by definition, is unchanging). God's desire for all to be saved is common ground in Piper's view and mine. The second piece of evidence is the biblical teaching that the salvation of a person is more highly valued by God than his condemnation. Where is this found? For one example, it is found in Christ's parables of the lost sheep, the coin, and the prodigal son. Of the parable of the sheep, "I tell you, in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous

⁵⁸ Piper, *Does God Desire all to be Saved?*, 16.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶² Ez. 18:23, 1 Tm. 2:4, 2 Pt. 3:9.

people who don't need repentance."⁶³ Of the coin parable, "I tell you, in the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who repents."⁶⁴ Of the prodigal son parable, "But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."⁶⁵ Each of these parables shows the immense pleasure God takes in the repentance of a single person, resulting in salvation. How does this fare against Piper's argumentation? Piper contests that God chooses some for damnation just in the same way as those for salvation, delighting equally in the fulfillment of His just wrath. He takes Romans 9:15-16 as a proof for this practice by God, "I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then, it does not depend on human will or effort but on God who shows mercy."⁶⁶ However, taking this verse in context, it becomes clear that Piper is imposing his presupposition of God's double election into the text. All the verse says is that God shows mercy on whom He chooses, the point being that humans have no place to question God's choices. Human will or effort or works will never change God's mind about whom He chooses to save.⁶⁷ But where does it say in Romans 9, or anywhere in Scripture, that God chooses some for salvation and others for damnation without considering the individuals'

⁶³ Lk. 15:6-8.

⁶⁴ Lk. 15:10.

⁶⁵ Lk. 15:32.

⁶⁶ Piper, *Does God Desire all to be Saved?*, 10.

⁶⁷ Piper's literal exegesis of Romans 9:15-16 in his work *Providence* matches exactly my exegesis here. It may be difficult to see that Piper is presupposing unconditional double election in his understanding of these verses if his understanding is fresh in the mind. He sums the point of these verses up quite nicely: "human willing and doing are not finally decisive in determining the way God's mercy is shown. God, in His absolute freedom—rooted in His being as God—is finally decisive, not human willing or doing." Even though a person chooses to have faith in Christ and repent, God can choose whether to save them ultimately. He is faithful and just to extend grace to all who believe. Piper, *Providence*, 399.

response? Rather, Scripture defines exactly whom God has chosen for salvation: those that believe in Jesus Christ. Romans 9 makes it clear that people are in no position to question why God chooses those who have faith and lets those who hate Christ be condemned to hell. I believe it is not reading any extra-biblical material into Romans 9:15-16 to presuppose God's election as contingent upon faith, but rather that it is a much more faithful reading of it than what Piper has done to defend unconditional double-election.

To solidify this argument with Scripture, as is the only way to properly do this entire argument justice, considering both Piper's and my respect for the Bible as God's Word and the ultimate authority in any theological matter, now consider Ephesians 1 to better understand God's election:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will: To the faithful saints in Christ Jesus at Ephesus. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the LORD Jesus Christ. Blessed is the God and Father of our LORD Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ. For He chose us in Him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless in love before Him. He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace that He lavished on us in the Beloved One...In Him we have also received an inheritance, because we were predestined according to the plan of the one who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of His will, so that we who had already put our hope in Christ might bring praise to His glory. In Him you also were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and when you believed.⁶⁸

The term *predestination* often intimidates the contemporary believer in the traditional Baptist view because it is almost now inherently associated with Reformed Theology, but this is not a term to fear because the context in which it appears in Scripture is not one of condemnation or exclusion, but one of encouragement. Note the way Paul starts his letter to the Ephesians,

⁶⁸ Ep. 1:1-5, 11-13.

being inspired by the Holy Spirit, “To the *faithful saints in Christ Jesus*.”⁶⁹ This epistle is to believers, those who have placed their faith in Christ already. He continues, “He chose *us* in Him...He predestined *us* to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ...according to the good pleasure of His will.”⁷⁰ Who is *us*? It is believers. God chose those that are in Christ to be adopted as His sons by Christ’s work on our behalf. God predestined believers for salvation. Without reading presuppositions into the text, the meaning becomes clear that whom God has chosen, even *predestined* for salvation, is exclusively due to faith: “In Him we have received an inheritance, because we were predestined...so that we *who had already put our hope in Christ* might bring praise to His glory.” Faith (saving faith, entailing a repentant heart) is what God’s predestination is *contingent* upon. This is not reading into the text. Even in Romans, at the start of the epistle, long before Romans 9 (meaning Paul had already made sure to cover it before talking about God’s choice of Jacob over Esau), Paul explicitly says that it is by faith that people inherit salvation. Romans 1:16-17 says, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith.” But note that faith is not a work in the sense that faith merits or makes someone deserving of God’s grace. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift—not from works, so that no one can boast.” God’s grace is what *saves*, and it is a gift. Faith (again, saving faith, entailing repentance) is all that is required of a person to receive the gift, but Paul makes it clear here to distinguish faith

⁶⁹ Ep. 1:1-5, 11-13.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

from the works of the Law. This distinction is made “so that no one can boast” about their salvation coming from themselves, because faith is assented to volitionally.

Concerning Piper's point that the condemnation of the wicked glorifies God, yes, this is biblically true, but just in the same way that Piper distinguishes God's wills, God is both loving and morally just. The glorification of God in the death of the wicked and His subsequent eternal punishment of the wicked glorifies God only in that it displays His just nature. God is holy and just because He is a righteous judge, showing no partiality. Romans 2:11-12 says, “For there is no favoritism with God. For all who sin without the law will also perish without the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law.” God commands all people to repent and trust in Christ, bringing them out from under the curse of the law, but He will also be faithful to reward all who are not covered by Christ's blood according to their works.⁷¹ Since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, if someone does not repent and trust in Christ, God, according to His law, is obligated by His good and just nature to condemn him.⁷² To Piper's argument for God's glory in unconditional double-election, there is no evidence found in Scripture for it, and the texts Piper uses to support it clearly fail to imply it.

Point Fifteen: Therefore, According to John Piper's Soteriology, God Cannot Be Good

Remember the definition of Good to be used is that God does not act in a way that is contrary to how He is described in Scripture. According to this definition, and the Scriptural proofs for the doctrine that not all people will be saved, God desires all to be saved, and that it is better for people to be saved than to be condemned, then Piper's soteriology, which has been

⁷¹ Rm. 3:27-31, Rm 2:6.

⁷² Rm. 3:23.

shown to say that God is the sole deciding factor for every individual's salvation, implicates God as *not Good* in failing to save all. For God to be Good, in Piper's soteriology, God would have to prove His desire for all to be saved by saving all. Simply saying, "everyone, without any exception, who receives Christ as supreme treasure—who believes in His name—will be united to Christ in the embrace of this electing love, and enjoy Him and all His gifts forever," with no basis at all in your own soteriology does not cover this glaring problem.⁷³ Again, it is Piper's words that no one possesses the ability to "receive Christ as supreme treasure" by believing in Him until after God does a work in him or her.⁷⁴

I by no means mean to say that Piper believes God is not good. That is far from the point I am trying to make. The main point I wish to make is that Scripture ought to be carefully interpreted in accordance with how God intended for it to be interpreted, with no dangerous presuppositions being read into its words—such presuppositions are those that ultimately create unnecessary contradictions within Scripture. I simply mean to say by point fifteen that Piper's soteriology as it stands is inconsistent with his belief that God is Good (or that God is faithful to His Word). If Piper contests that God is faithful to the Scriptures that say God chooses whom He wills, then he has missed the point that the other half of Scripture says God is merciful and loving to all people in desiring that all would come to saving faith in Him and providing Christ's sacrifice as a sufficient atonement for all people's sins for all time.

⁷³ Piper, *Does God Desire all to be Saved?*, 54.

⁷⁴ Piper, *Desiring God*, 65.

Human Free Will and the Implication of God in Sin

So, what is the dark presupposition about humanity that Piper brings into his reading of Scripture? It is the Calvinistic interpretation of Total Depravity that implies that humanity, at least post-Fall, does not have free will, at least within the context of salvation.^{75,76} Piper has gone so far as to extend this doctrine to eliminating all human free will. In an interview on his website, desiringgod.org, Piper says, “There is no random chance. There is no ultimate human autonomy.”⁷⁷ He draws this conclusion from several Scriptures, namely Isaiah 46:9-10, Jeremiah 1:12, and Ezekiel 12:25. These verses, say things like, “I am God...I declare the end from the beginning...I will do all my will...I will put my salvation in Zion, my splendor in Israel,” “I watch over my word to accomplish it,” and “I, the LORD, will speak whatever message I will speak, and it will be done.” However, these verses only show that God is active in history, performing certain events and planning certain things to accomplish His will, His desire to bring salvation to humanity and fulfill the prophecies of Scripture. Human autonomy is not denounced anywhere in Scripture, though there are certain cases where God influences people to choose certain things so that His good will for a specific situation will be done. God preventing someone from doing a particular evil does not show that people do not have the free will to sin; otherwise, knowing that God does not sin, there would be no sin ever committed since God would prevent them all. In some cases in Scripture, God is described as “hardening hearts” or “closing

⁷⁵ Jean Calvin, and John Allen, *Institutes of the Christian Religion (Vol. 1 of 2)*, Project Gutenberg, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/45001>, 2014, 268-269.

⁷⁶ Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, Chapter X, Section 2.

⁷⁷ John Piper, “Is God Ever Surprised?” *Desiring God*, www.desiringgod.org/interviews/is-god-ever-surprised.

eyes/ears” for the purpose of temporarily preventing human will from infringing upon God’s plans.⁷⁸ This reasoning would be absurd if there was no free will.

In the same interview on his website, Piper says, speaking of the future, that “He knows [the future] because He plans it and does it. He knows it because He plans it and performs it.”⁷⁹ What this belief does beyond creating a very real danger of adding to Scripture is implicate God in sin. If what Piper said in this interview—which I believe is entailed by his interpretation of total depravity—is what he truly believes, then God plans all the evil acts that people have done and will do in the history of the world. Even further, not only does God *plan* these acts, but He *performs/does* them. Hopefully, Piper does not mean what he has said here, because what it amounts to is that God does evil acts. This belief is heinous in the context of Scripture which says numerous times that the LORD is Holy and righteous.⁸⁰ Talking about Jesus, 2 Peter 2:22 says, “He did not commit sin, and no deceit was found in His mouth.” In Revelation 1:15, John describes the feet of Jesus as being “like fine bronze as it is fired in a furnace.” The feet, in Scripture, refer to one’s walk, which is an analogy for the way someone lives, the morality of their deeds throughout life. This means that Christ’s walk is holy, so holy that His feet shine like mirrors due to their cleanliness. God would never commit an evil act, and He is not even tempted by evil.⁸¹ I challenge Piper, as a brother in Christ, to review his ideas about the nature of humanity according to Scripture, that he might fix whatever he might believe about soteriology

⁷⁸ Is. 6:10, Mk. 4:11-12, Jn. 12:40.

⁷⁹ Piper, “Is God Ever Surprised?” desiringgod.org.

⁸⁰ Ex. 34:6, Is 6:3, Rv. 4:8.

⁸¹ Jas. 1:13.

that is wrong. This is to help other fellow believers as well, who hold to Piper's teachings as trustworthy and fail to faithfully test all teachers against the words of Scripture.

An Alternative Interpretation of the Bible's Soteriology

God's foreknowledge does not have to be explained by His interactions with planning certain events of the future or ordaining certain things. Such a necessity for foreknowledge would be a limitation on God's omniscience, to assume that the only way He could know what is going to happen is if He plans or performs what will happen Himself. Rather, I believe that God knows all events of all time and I believe He knows everything that all people will think and do, in their free will, despite when these things are thought or done. God's omniscience is not something that a finite person can ever understand, but it can be believed in accordance with what Scripture teaches about God. This understanding of foreknowledge, I believe, gives more glory to God in that He knows all actions that separate autonomous beings perform. It is much more difficult to predict the actions of others than one's own. As for the concept of human free will, I believe its existence is an implicit truth in Scripture, and that nowhere in Scripture is it denied as nonexistent. Like Piper, I also believe that there is no such thing as luck, or "random chance."⁸² Proverbs 16:33 says, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD."⁸³ But even without this verse, God has created the universe and the laws of nature with order. Things like gravity determine how objects will interact with each other. Though I could never figure out the complexity of the universe in its entirety, God knows exactly how it works,

⁸² Piper, "Is God Ever Surprised?" desiringgod.org.

⁸³ This verse may seem to present determinism, but this proverb refers to processes outside of human volition. The movement of dice is determined by the laws of physics, laws God created and understands the intricacies of.

and He created it exactly how it is. I also believe that God created humanity with a libertarian free will, to choose between right and wrong, and even to make distinctions between things that have nothing to do with morality, like personal preferences regarding foods or colors. But where is the basis for human autonomy in Scripture? Again, I believe it is implicit in multiple aspects such as Scripture's ascription of moral responsibility to people for their actions. It is like the doctrine of the Trinity: though the term *Trinity* never appears in Scripture, Scripture is clear both that God is one and God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁸⁴

Scripture implicitly teaches that humans have free will in the following ways. One way is through the numerous commands of Scripture for people to repent or have faith in God. As I have argued earlier, there would be no point for Scripture to command people to repent knowing that no one possesses the ability to repent. If this were the case, then God would have included these commands simply to cover His bases, particularly the one that says people are without excuse. Such a reason for listing any commands is rather demeaning of the LORD since those commands would ultimately be empty—just there to point to when objectors claim they have an excuse. However, there would indeed exist an excuse to not repent or follow Christ: inability—and God's neglecting to regenerate hearts. Therefore, I believe when Scripture says, "Therefore, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent, because He has set a day when He is going to judge the world in righteousness by the Man He has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead," that it is

⁸⁴ Mt. 28:19, Dt. 6:4.

purposeful, for there would be no purpose in this verse, or any one like it, if no one possessed the ability to repent.⁸⁵

Another way that Scripture shows human free will is how it describes the *persuading* of men to believe in Christ, how some hear the same message and are not persuaded while others are.⁸⁶ II Corinthians 5:11 says, "Therefore, since we know the fear of the LORD, we try to persuade people. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your consciences." Acts 18:4 says of Paul, "He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and tried to persuade both Jews and Greeks." Acts 19:8 says, "Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly over a period of three months, arguing and persuading them about the kingdom of God." These verses' contents are understood better in the light of Romans 10:13-15:

For everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved. How, then, can they call on Him they have not believed in? And how can they believe without hearing about Him? And how can they hear without a preacher? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.

The news is good because it is for all people. All people possess the ability to accept Christ's gift of salvation, and that is why the angel said to the shepherds, speaking of the Messiah, "I proclaim to you good news of great joy *that will be for all the people.*"⁸⁷ A common Calvinist retort to the claim that people have the free will to accept God's gift of salvation is to quote Romans 3, saying "no one seeks for God."⁸⁸ However, Paul's point in this chapter is to show that no human can earn salvation, and that salvation is from God through faith in Christ alone. The

⁸⁵ Acts 17:30-31.

⁸⁶ Acts 2:41, 28:24.

⁸⁷ An angel is speaking in this verse, so the phrase "all the people" can safely be concluded as referring to all people. There is a reflection of Old Testament prophecies and covenants as well in this phrasing. Lk. 2:10b.

⁸⁸ v. 11b.

verse quoted indicates that apart from God's seeking out of the lost, they are hopeless because they will never find God on their own. Otherwise the point that no human possesses the ability to respond to Christ contradicts the teaching in Romans 10 that without a preacher, without hearing the Word, no person will ever be able to respond to it. Faith and repentance are not good works from within a person's soul alone that merit salvation; they are a response of submission to God's call to salvation.⁸⁹

The main reason that I do not call myself Arminian is because of its view on human depravity. Though Arminianism teaches that human beings have free will in soteriology, it is only due to God's offering of prevenient grace to all people that they are able to have faith and repent. Prevenient grace is God's giving of the ability to believe in Christ to all people despite their inability to have faith because of their sins otherwise.⁹⁰ I do not believe that the sin nature inherited from Adam extends to the free will of persons. The freedom of the human will is an inherent ability in all people from God's design of humankind in His image, and there is no biblical basis for thinking spiritual deadness affects the cognitive ability to assent to beliefs and submit to authority. Since God is a free agent, able to choose whether to create or not, I believe man is free, able to choose whether to believe (respond to God's call to salvation positively) or not.⁹¹ I believe that the depravity of the human nature resulting from original sin (Adam's sin) means that no person possesses the ability to save himself. I believe that "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All

⁸⁹ Allen, Hankins, and Harwood, *Anyone can be Saved*, 20.

⁹⁰ Joel Houston, *Wesley, Whitefield, and the 'Free Grace' Controversy: The Crucible of Methodism* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge), 2019, 132.

⁹¹ Allen, Hankins, and Harwood, *Anyone can be Saved*, 22.

have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one,” and that all this means is that apart from God’s work to save people, everyone is already condemned because of their unrighteousness.⁹² That is why John 3:18 says, “whoever does not believe stands condemned already.” Only in Christ can anyone find salvation.

I believe regeneration to mean something quite different from how Piper describes it. Regeneration refers to being born again, the new birth that Christ describes to Nicodemus in the New Testament. Regeneration is a work of the Holy Spirit in conversion (salvation, basically) to give a person’s soul a *new birth*, raising that person, effectively, from spiritual death to spiritual life.⁹³ Salvation simplified is as follows (according to my and the traditional Baptist view):

1. God offers the free gift of salvation by the blood of Christ to a person (by whatever means He uses).
2. The person recognizes his or her sinfulness and need for God’s salvation.⁹⁴
3. The person responds to God’s offer by placing his or her faith in Christ and having a repentant heart.⁹⁵

⁹² Rm. 3:10b-12.

⁹³ Allen, Hankins, and Harwood, *Anyone can be Saved*, 20-21.

⁹⁴ Every instance of salvation in Scripture depicts the recipient of salvation realizing his sinfulness and need for a savior, implicitly if not explicitly. For example, the woman in Matthew 9 knew she needed physical healing, but Christ says to her, “your faith has saved you” (v.22). In the case of the thief on the cross in Luke 23, the thief who was saved says, “we are receiving what we deserve for our crimes” (v. 41).

⁹⁵ This is a volitional human response of essentially submitting to Christ’s will for one’s life (both His commanding will for all to repent, and His desiring will that wants all to repent and be saved).

4. God saves that person (this includes God's justification by the blood of Christ—i.e., declaring one no longer guilty of sin—, the regeneration of the soul, and sanctification—i.e., being made holy or righteous in God's sight).⁹⁶
5. Included in the event of salvation is a spiritual adoption of the person into God's family.⁹⁷

The difference between this view and Piper's view, mainly, is that in his view, God has basically already saved someone at step one, and his step one is regeneration. Once God regenerates a person, according to Piper, salvation is immediately guaranteed.

Closing Remarks

In this thesis, I have attempted to call out a brother in Christ on a teaching that is not biblical. Hopefully what I have said is first honoring to God. I know Piper does not tend to like philosophical arguments against his doctrine because of the danger that they are not biblically based. I would like to echo what Piper said in his work *Providence* as it is a very good thing to remember when studying Scripture, "Let us not bring to the text our philosophical assumptions that dictate what God's wisdom and goodness and justice must do."⁹⁸ For this reason, I have used Scripture as the sole authority for my arguments. If anything I have said is not based in Scripture, I hope that it would be forgotten or corrected.

To summarize the many points that I have made in this thesis concerning soteriology, Scripture implicitly teaches that all people possess the free will to choose whether to have faith

⁹⁶ N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 2009, 91.

⁹⁷ Allen, Hankins, and Harwood, *Anyone can be Saved*, 22.

⁹⁸ Piper, *Providence*, 417.

in Christ and repent; Scripture teaches that no person possesses the ability to save himself; Scripture teaches that faith in Christ and repentance are the only two things required of the human response for salvation; Scripture distinguishes saving faith from good works; and Scripture teaches that God alone saves. Hopefully important distinctions have been clarified concerning Reformed Theology, Arminianism, and the Traditional Southern Baptist soteriology as well. I hope that Piper will reassess his presuppositions against what Scripture says, and I hope that this thesis is in no way taken to be hostile or troublesome.

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