

# John Piper and Christian Hedonism

Part 1 & 2, January 10, 2012

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## Part I

### JOHN PIPER AND CHRISTIAN HEDONISM

John Piper (b. 1946) has a rapidly-growing influence among fundamentalists in general and Independent Baptists in particular.

A 2005 survey of roughly 1,100 “young fundamentalists”, found that John Piper has a significant influence. Almost 50% agreed with the statement, “John Piper’s ministry has been a help to me”.

The survey largely represented graduates of Bob Jones University (29% of those surveyed), Maranatha Baptist Bible College (22%), and Northland Baptist Bible College (21%). (For more on this see the report “A Survey of Young Fundamentalists” at the Way of Life web site.)

Kevin Bauder of Central Baptist Seminary has used his blog to praise “conservative evangelicals” such as Piper.

John Piper is the senior pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota, which is so wishy-washy that the board of elders proposed in 2002 that the constitution be amended to allow a candidate to reject believer’s baptism by immersion if he “sincerely and humbly believes that it would be contrary to Scripture and conscience--and not just contrary to family tradition or desires--to be baptized by immersion and thus to count his infant baptism or his adult sprinkling as improper or invalid”. The proposal did not pass, but the fact remains that Piper and the elders were willing to entertain infant baptism in some instances, which is a heretical position for a so-called Baptist church to take. The Greek word “baptizo” means immersion and baptism is called a burial in Scripture (Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12). Immersion is not just a mode of baptism; it is baptism; and there is not one example in Scripture of an infant being baptized. To the contrary, the requirement for baptism is faith in Christ and an infant is clearly incapable of that (Mk. 16:16; Acts 8:36-39; 16:30-33). Though many sincerely believe that their infant baptism or adult sprinkling is a genuine baptism, they are sincerely misled and should in no wise be encouraged in their error by Baptist preachers.

Because of John Piper’s rapidly growing influence in fundamentalist circles, I have studied two of his major books to understand his teaching, an old one and a new one: *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (2011 edition) and *Don’t Waste Your Life* (2009 edition). I have also spent time reading his blog.

My conclusion is that Piper’s teaching is a web of truth and error. It appears to me that he is a very sincere man who is the product of corrupt contemporary evangelicalism (Fuller Theological Seminary) and major personalities within this movement (e.g., Harold Ockenga, Francis Schaeffer, C.S. Lewis, and Daniel Fuller).

Piper’s writings contain many golden nuggets, but there is death in the pot and I could not quote him in my writings in good conscience, just as I cannot quote C.S. Lewis.

Piper has a commendable passion for world evangelism. He doesn’t beat around the bush about some very fundamental truths, such as the lostness of man, the narrowness of the Gospel, the blood atonement, and the reality of hell.

But as we will see, even his gospel is terribly confused by his hyper-Calvinistic “you must be born again before you believe” heresy.

## CHRISTIAN HEDONISM

By his own testimony, the central principle of John Piper’s theology is “Christian Hedonism”. This is his term and he has defended it through the years against all challenges. He says it is “a philosophy that touches virtually every area of my life”.

This principle is developed in his book *Desiring God*, which is treated as a manual for Christian living. Piper has a *Desiring God* blog, conducts *Desiring God* conferences and seminars, and even has live *Desiring God* Read-Alongs in which people are encouraged to read through the book in a united fashion. It is a major influence in modern evangelicalism.

Christian Hedonism is the doctrine that man’s highest calling is to pursue his own happiness by pursuing God.

It is defined by Piper and those he quotes on the subject as follows:

“I found in myself an overwhelming longing to be happy, a tremendously powerful impulse to seek pleasure, yet at every point of moral decision I said to myself that this impulse should have no influence ... Then I was converted to Christian Hedonism. In a matter of weeks I came to see that it is unbiblical and arrogant to try to worship God for any other reason than the pleasure to be had in Him” (*Desiring God*, Introduction).

“The desire to be happy is a proper motive for every good deed, and *if you abandon the pursuit of your own joy you cannot love man or please God*”.

“The widespread notion that high moral acts must be free from self-interest is a great enemy of true worship” (*Desiring God*, location 1683).

“To be sure, we Christian Hedonists endeavor to pursue our interest and our happiness with all our might. ... But we have learned from the Bible ... that God’s interest is to magnify the fullness of His glory by spilling over in mercy to us. Therefore, the pursuit of our interest and our happiness is never above God’s but always in God’s” (*Desiring God*, location 2860).

“If I were to ask you why you have believed in Christ, why you have become Christians, every man will answer truly, ‘For the sake of happiness’” (Augustine, quoted at beginning of *Desiring God*, chapter 2).

“The will for life is the will for joy, delight, happiness. .. In every real man the will for life is also the will for joy. In everything he wills, he wills and intends also that this, too, exist for him in some form. ... It is hypocrisy to hide this from oneself. And the hypocrisy would be at the expense of the ethical truth that he should will to enjoy himself, just as he should will to eat, drink, sleep, be healthy, work, stand for what is right and live in fellowship with God and his neighbor” (Karl Barth, cited in *Desiring God*, location 3775).

“It is a Christian duty, as you know, for everyone to be as happy as he can” (C.S. Lewis, cited in *Desiring God*, location 1615).

“If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith” (C.S. Lewis, cited in *Desiring God*, location 1710).

Christian Hedonism is an exceedingly subtle mixture of truth and error, but the error is serious. Peter Masters, senior pastor of Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, the church made famous by Charles Spurgeon, told me in February 2011 that he believes Piper’s teaching is “dangerous”. He warned about it in “Christian Hedonism - Is It Right?” *Sword & Trowel*, 2002, No. 3.

Piper is quick to say that Christian Hedonism “does not mean God becomes a means to help us get worldly pleasures”.

But in spite of this disclaimer Christian hedonism has played right into the hands of the Christian rock movement with its “don’t let anyone tell you how to live” philosophy, the charismatic movement, and the “culturally liberal” element of the emerging church. In fact, Piper’s philosophy has been influential in all of these movements.

## THE ROOTS OF CHRISTIAN HEDONISM

In *Desiring God* and *Don’t Waste Your Life*, Piper describes the roots of Christian Hedonism. Though he is convinced that this philosophy is Bible-based, he is candid in his admission that he originally got it from the writings of the following men.

### Blaise Pascal

One of the first men cited by Piper in his book *Desiring God* is Blaise Pascal.

“During my first quarter in seminary, I was introduced to the argument for Christian Hedonism and one of its great exponents, Blaise Pascal. He wrote: ‘All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. ... The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hand themselves’. This statement so fit with my own deep longings, and all that I had ever seen in others, that I accepted it and have never found any reason to doubt it. ... Jonathan Edwards tied it [Pascal’s statement] to the Word of Christ: ‘Jesus knew that all mankind were in the pursuit of happiness. He has directed them in the true way to it, and He tells them what they must become in order to be blessed and happy’” (*Desiring God*, location 198, 212, 3761).

The Roman Catholic Blaise Pascal was a brilliant mathematician but he was also a theological heretic and a deeply confused man, spiritually. Though he attacked some aspects of Romanism, he accepted the papacy, the mass, the saints, Mariolatry, and veneration of relics. He was deeply influenced by the blind mysticism of Jansenism and he spent a lot of time in the convent where his sister was a nun and where Catholic mysticism was practiced. His only written statement of absolute faith pertained to a supposed miracle that occurred in the Port-Royal nunnery whereby his niece was supposedly cured of an eye disease by the application of a thorn from the crown of thorns placed on Christ’s head. His most influential book, *The Pensees (Thoughts)* contains a philosophy that rejects infallible divine Revelation and is therefore certain about nothing except an ill-defined humility and grace. He claims that man cannot know the deep things of God and mysteries of the universe. He called for a blind “leap in the dark faith in God” for pragmatic reasons (because to believe in God is safer than to not believe in God). Consider the following excerpt:

“If I saw no signs of a divinity, I would fix myself in denial. If I saw everywhere the marks of a Creator, I would repose peacefully in faith. But seeing too much to deny Him, and too little to assure me, I am in a pitiful state, and I would wish a hundred times that if a God sustains nature it would reveal Him without ambiguity”.

His Bible was nature and his gospel was the sacramental works-faith gospel of Rome -- “taking the holy water, having masses said..”.

He encouraged his readers to pursue this gospel even if they didn’t believe in it.

“You would like to attain faith, and do not know the way; you would like to cure yourself of unbelief, and ask the remedy for it. Learn of those who have been bound like you, and who now stake all their possessions. These are people who know the way which you would follow, and who are cured of an ill of which you would be cured. Follow the way by which they began; by acting as if they believed, taking the holy water, having masses said, etc. Even this will naturally make you believe, and deaden your acuteness. -- ‘But this is what I am afraid of’.--And why? What have you to lose?”

The Bible answer to the question “What have you to lose?” is that you have your eternal soul to lose in hell because by rejecting the gospel of the grace of Christ for a false gospel.

Pascal is a very dangerous man to follow in spiritual matters, and yet a quotation from him is foundational to John Piper’s Christian Hedonism.

### C.S. Lewis

John Piper is a C.S. Lewis disciple. He quotes Lewis frequently and in the most positive terms (he mentions certain “flaws” in passing, without specifically identifying them). Piper says, “C.S. Lewis ... walked up over the horizon of my little brown path in 1964 with such blazing brightness that it is hard to overstate the impact he had on my life” (*Don’t Waste Your Life*, p. 19). He says that “for the next five or six years I was almost never without a Lewis book near at hand” (p. 20). He says that Lewis “helped me become live to life” (p. 19).

In the Preface of *Desiring God*, Piper lists Lewis as one of the “heroes of this book”. Piper calls Lewis “the man who taught me to see” (*Don’t Waste Your Life*, p. 18).

In laying out the history of how he developed the doctrine of Christian hedonism, Piper writes:

“I had grown to love the works of C.S. Lewis in college. But not until later did I buy the sermon called ‘The Weight of Glory’. The first page of that sermon is ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PAGES OF LITERATURE I HAVE EVER READ. ‘... If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith”’ (*Desiring God*, Introduction).

The “flaws” of C.S. Lewis were fundamental, beginning with salvation and the gospel itself. Even *Christianity Today* admits that Lewis “was anything but a classic evangelical, socially or theologically. ... he didn’t subscribe to biblical inerrancy or penal substitution. He believed in purgatory and baptismal regeneration” (“C.S. Lewis Superstar”, *Christianity Today*, Dec. 2005).

*The inerrant inspiration of Scripture* is a fundamental of the faith, but Lewis denied it. In a letter to the editor of *Christianity Today*, Feb. 28, 1964, Dr. W. Wesley Shrader, First Baptist Church, Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, warned that “C.S. Lewis ... would never embrace the (literal-infallible) view of the Bible” (*F.B.F. News Bulletin*, March 4, 1984). Lewis even believed that Jonah and Job are not historical books (“Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism”, *Christian Reflections*, edited by Walter Hooper, Eerdmans).

*The necessity of supernatural conversion through repentance and faith in Christ* is a fundamental of the faith, but there is no evidence that Lewis experienced this. I have read several of his books, dozens of his articles, and three large biographies about him, and I have never seen a clear teaching on the new birth or a clear biblical testimony that he was born again. This should be cause for the deepest concern. Lewis’ autobiography *Surprised by Joy* presents a very confused testimony. Lewis definitely experienced a mystical conversion of some sort and he changed from Atheist to Christian, but that is not biblical regeneration. This has happened to many others, including Malcolm Muggeridge, who at the end of the day were committed to a false sacramental gospel (Roman Catholicism), which Paul identified as cursed of God (Galatians 1).

*The “penal substitutionary atonement”* is a fundamental of the faith, but Lewis denied it. The Bible plainly states that Christ shed His blood and died to satisfy the penalty of God’s holy Law. But Lewis claimed that it does not matter how one “defines” the atonement and stated that he did not believe in substitutionary blood atonement (*Mere Christianity*, HarperSanFrancisco edition, 2001 pp. 54-56, 182). That we have eternal redemption and boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Christ is not a “theory” or a “formula”; it is a fundamental teaching of God’s Word; it is the very heart of the Gospel; and if one does not receive it he cannot be saved.

As Charles Spurgeon said: “If thou receive not His perfect, unrivalled blood-washing, thou art no Christian. Whatever be thy profession, whatever thy supposed experience, whatever thy reformation, whatever thou mayst have attempted or accomplished, if thou hast never come as a guilty one, and seen thy sin laid upon the bleeding Son of God, thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. ... Without faith in the atonement thou canst have no part in Christ” (C.H.S., *Sermons*, 16, 220 & 223).

*Salvation by grace without works and sacrament* is a fundamental of the faith, but Lewis believed in baptismal regeneration and taught that the “Christ-life” is spread to men through baptism, belief, and the eucharist (*Mere Christianity*, p. 61).

*The sole Mediatorship of Christ* is a fundamental of the faith, but Lewis denied it. He believed in prayers for the dead (*Letters to Malcolm*, p. 109). Lewis confessed his sins regularly to a priest and was given the sacrament of last rites on July 16, 1963 (Roger Lancelyn Green and Walter Hooper, *C.S. Lewis: A Biography*, 1974, pp. 198, 301).

*The existence of heaven and hell* and the absence of an intermediate stage is a fundamental of the faith, but Lewis denied it, believing in purgatory (*Letters to Malcolm*, pp. 110-111).

*The literal six-day creation* is a fundamental of the faith, taught from one end of the Bible to the other and placed at the very heart of the gospel (e.g., the literal fall of man, Christ's genealogy traced from Adam), but Lewis denied it, believing in theistic evolution. He considered the Genesis creation account a "Hebrew folk tale". In *The Problem of Pain* Lewis said "man is physically descended from animals". He claims that man "may have existed for ages in this state before it became man". Then God "caused to descend upon this organism a new kind of consciousness".

*The doctrine of an eternal, fiery hell* is a fundamental of the faith, but Lewis denied it. He taught that hell is a state of mind: "Hell is a state of mind--ye never said a truer word. And every state of mind, left to itself, every shutting up of the creature within the dungeon of its own mind--is, in the end, Hell" (Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, p. 65).

*The doctrine of the finality of one's destiny at death* is a fundamental of the faith, but Lewis taught a second chance and the possibility of repentance beyond this life. This is the theme of *The Great Divorce*. "Is judgment not final? Is there really a way out of Hell into Heaven? 'It depends on the way ye're using the words. If they leave that grey town behind it will not have been Hell. To any that leaves it, it is Purgatory. And perhaps ye had better not call this country Heaven. Not Deep Heaven, ye understand'" (*The Great Divorce*). In this book Lewis taught that questions such as the finality of men's destiny and purgatory cannot be understood in this present life and we should not worry about them.

*Salvation exclusively through the name of Christ* is another fundamental of the faith that Lewis denied. He said that it would not be very wrong to pray to Apollo, because to do so would be to "address Christ *sub specie Apollonius*" (C.S. Lewis to Chad Walsh, May 23, 1960, cited from George Sayer, *Jack: A Life of C.S. Lewis*, 1994, p. 378). Lewis elsewhere claimed that followers of pagan religions can be saved without personal faith in Jesus Christ (*Mere Christianity*, HarperSanFrancisco edition, 2001, pp. 64, 208, 209). In the popular *Narnia* series, which has influenced countless children, Lewis taught that those who sincerely serve the devil (called *Tash*) are actually serving Christ (*Aslan*) and will eventually be accepted by God. "But I said, 'Alas, Lord, I am no son of thine but the servant of Tash'. He answered, 'Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me'. ... Therefore, if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him'" (*The Last Battle*, chapter 15, "Further Up and Further In").

It is obvious that C.S. Lewis was a rank heretic who held to truly damnable heresies, even touching salvation and the gospel, yet John Piper freely admits that his doctrine of Christian Hedonism was derived in large part from Lewis' writings. Instead of fleeing from Lewis when he discovered his heresies, instead of avoiding him as commanded in Romans 16:17 and other Scriptures, Piper embraced him.

### **Daniel Fuller**

Another major influence in the development of Christian Hedonism was Daniel Fuller, president of Fuller Theological Seminary. Piper writes:

"I remain ever in debt to Daniel Fuller in all I do. It was his class in 1968 where the seminal discoveries were made. ... He remains a treasured friend and teacher" (*Desiring God*, Preface).

"My debt at this pint to Daniel Fuller is incalculable" (*Don't Waste Your Life*, p. 26).

Daniel Fuller, son of Charles Fuller, founder of Fuller Theological Seminary, is the sad product of New Evangelicalism's renunciation of separatism. In the pursuit of impressive educational credentials he was sent to Germany to sit at the feet of theological modernists, and the impact on his faith, as could be expected (1 Corinthians 15:33), was negative. He rejected the fundamental doctrine of

the inerrancy of Scripture and became a leader in the push to change Fuller's doctrinal statement to reflect his heretical view. This occurred in 1972. The original statement said that the Bible is "plenary inspired and free from all error in the whole and in the part". The new statement eliminated "free from all error in the whole and in the part", thus leaving room for the heretical view that the Bible contains errors, a view held by the dean of the Seminary, Daniel Fuller, and the President, David Hubbard, and by some Fuller professors. These included Paul Jewett, who wrote in his 1975 book *Man as Male and Female*, "Genesis 1 is not a literal piece of scientific reporting, but a narrative which illumines the ultimate meaning of Man's existence. ... religious myth or saga, biblical allegory" (pp. 122, 123). Fuller professors Edward Carnell and Wilbur Smith endorsed Bernard Ramm's book *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*, which claimed that the Bible is only divinely inspired in some matters and that it contains mistakes in areas such as science and history. Ramm wrote, "Whatever in the Scripture is in direct reference to natural things is most likely in terms of the prevailing cultural concepts". He accepted theistic evolution, denied that the Noahic flood was worldwide, explained many of the Exodus miracles in a naturalistic manner, denied that the sun stood still in Joshua's day, etc.

The downgrade of the doctrine of biblical inspiration was in full bloom when Piper was at Fuller Seminary from 1968-71 and his favorite teacher there was at the forefront of this heresy, yet Piper has nothing but praise for Daniel Fuller and does not even mention this serious controversy in the context of his praise.

The spiritual downfall of Fuller Theological Seminary was documented in 1976 by former Fuller vice-president Harold Lindsell in *The Battle for the Bible*.

John Piper's recommendation of Daniel Fuller and his admission that Fuller had a major impact on his life is a very serious matter.

### **Harold John Ockenga**

Another major influence on Piper was Harold John Ockenga. Piper writes:

"Ockenga, then pastor of Park Street Church in Boston, was preaching in chapel each morning during the spiritual emphasis week. I was listening on WETN, the college radio station. Never had I heard exposition of the Scriptures like this. ... I lay there feeling as if I had awakened from a dream, and knew, now that I was awake, what I was to do" (*Don't Waste Your Life*, p. 21).

Again, there is no warning. Ockenga is praised and recommended non-critically.

Harold Ockenga was one of the fathers of New Evangelicalism. He was extremely influential. He was pastor of Park Street Church in Boston, founder of the National Association of Evangelicals, co-founder and first president of Fuller Theological Seminary, first president of the World Evangelical Fellowship, president of Gordon College, on the board of directors for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, chairman of the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and one-time editor of *Christianity Today*.

Ockenga claimed to have coined the term "neo-evangelical" and to have birthed the movement. Following is how he defined New Evangelicalism in 1976 when he wrote the foreword to Harold Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible*:

"Neo-evangelicalism was born in 1948 in connection with a convocation address which I gave in the Civic Auditorium in Pasadena. While reaffirming the theological view of fundamentalism, this address REPUDIATED ITS ECCLESIOLOGY AND ITS SOCIAL THEORY. The ringing call for A REPUDIATION OF SEPARATISM AND THE SUMMONS TO SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT received a hearty response from many evangelicals. The name caught on and spokesmen such as Drs. Harold Lindsell, Carl F.H. Henry, Edward Carnell, and Gleason Archer supported this viewpoint. We had no intention of launching a movement, but found that the emphasis attracted widespread support and exercised great influence. Neo-evangelicalism is ... DIFFERENT FROM FUNDAMENTALISM IN ITS REPUDIATION OF SEPARATISM AND ITS DETERMINATION TO ENGAGE ITSELF IN THE THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE OF THE DAY. IT HAD A NEW EMPHASIS UPON THE APPLICATION OF THE GOSPEL TO THE SOCIOLOGICAL, POLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC AREAS OF LIFE. Neo-evangelicals emphasized the restatement of

Christian theology in accordance with the need of the times, the REENGAGEMENT IN THE THEOLOGICAL DEBATE, THE RECAPTURE OF DENOMINATIONAL LEADERSHIP, AND THE REEXAMINATION OF THEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS SUCH AS THE ANTIQUITY OF MAN, THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE FLOOD, GOD’S METHOD OF CREATION, AND OTHERS”.

This statement is contradictory and disingenuous. Ockenga said that New Evangelicalism affirmed the theological view of fundamentalism, but in the same breath he says that New Evangelicalism called for “the reexamination of theological problems such as the antiquity of man, the universality of the flood, God’s method of creation, and others”. That describes a definite and dramatic downgrade in the “fundamentalist” view of the divine inspiration of Scripture. It was a shameful capitulation to modern science, falsely so-called. To the Bible believer, the antiquity of man, the universality of the flood, and God’s method of creation are not “problems” to be solved; they are divine doctrines to be believed.

From its inception New Evangelicalism has been a subtle but heinous attack upon the faith once delivered to the saints. You can’t “repudiate separatism” without repudiating the Bible, because separation is a fundamental teaching of God’s Word.

Separation is not mean or unloving; it is not a “non-essential” or an optional part of Christianity; it is a divine commandment.

“mark them . . . and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17)

“be ye not unequally yoked together with” (2 Cor. 6:14)

“have no fellowship with” (2 Cor. 6:14)

“come out from among them” (2 Cor. 6:17)

“withdraw thyself” (1 Tim. 6:5)

“shun” (2 Ti. 2:16)

“purge oneself from” (2 Tim. 2:21)

“from such turn away” (2 Tim. 3:5)

“reject” (Titus 3:10)

“receive them not into your house neither bid them Godspeed” (2 Jn. 10)

John Piper and his Christian Hedonism doctrine are products of the New Evangelical movement and there was death in that pot from its inception. Piper was trained at two dyed-in-the-wool New Evangelical institutions (Wheaton and Fuller) and he has never renounced New Evangelicalism and its heresies.

In light of New Evangelicalism’s repudiation of separatism, it is not surprising that Wheaton and Fuller have gotten ever more apostate through the years, yet Piper continues to speak fondly of them and to praise his old New Evangelical teachers. Most recently, Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Seminary, praised Rob Bell’s universalistic book *Love Wins*. He called it a “fine book” and said, “I basically agree with his theology” (“The Orthodoxy of Rob Bell, Christian Post, Mar. 20, 2011). This tells us just how terribly far Fuller Seminary has fallen from its roots in Charles Fuller’s “only through the blood” evangelistic ministry. Mouw agrees with Bell that it is wrong to say, “Accept Jesus right now, because if ten minutes from now you die without accepting this offer God will punish you forever in the fires of hell”. Mouw comments, “What kind of God are we presenting to the person?” The answer is the God of the Bible and the God that was preached by the founders of Fuller Theological Seminary. It is Bell and Mouw who have the new god. Mouw says that after a rabbi friend of his died, he “held out the hope that ... Jesus would welcome him into the heavenly realm”. I’ve never read anything like that in the Bible, but C.S. Lewis taught this very thing. Mouw says that those who question Mother Teresa’s salvation just because she believed a false gospel should be ashamed of themselves. I guess, then, that the apostle Paul should be ashamed of himself for saying that those who preach a false gospel are accursed of God (Galatians 1).

I want to hasten to say that John Piper does not accept the heresies of universalism and the denial of an eternal fiery hell. He has even reproved Rob Bell in his blog, but he does not see that it was the fundamental errors of New Evangelicalism, such as the repudiation of separatism and the emphasis

on dialogue and re-examination of doctrine, that created the current situation in which evangelicalism is shot through and through with damnable heresies.

That Piper is a product of and has not renounced New Evangelicalism is a very serious matter.

That his doctrine of Christian Hedonism is based on the writings of New Evangelicals and rank heretics is a loud warning.

## **INTERMINGLING HAPPINESS WITH THE PURSUIT OF GOD**

To desire God is Scriptural, but incorporating my happiness into the principle is not.

We would not argue with an emphasis on desiring God. We are exhorted to delight ourselves in the Lord. We are to love him with all the heart, soul, strength, and mind. We are to love Him so fervently that our love for any other person or thing appears to be hate (Luke 14:26). We are given the example of a soul that panteth after the Lord as a hart panteth after the water brooks. God is to be my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, my strength, my buckler, the horn of my salvation, my high tower.

No, there is absolutely nothing wrong with desiring God, and we cannot desire God too much. That is the purpose for which we were made. That is the very essence of genuine human life.

What we reject is the formula that John Piper has devised and the presentation of this particular formula as the essence of Christian living.

What we reject is connecting our happiness so directly with the pursuit of God, because the Bible does not do this.

There is plenty of happiness and joy in the godly Christian life even in this present world, but the Bible doesn't emphasize this the way Piper does.

It's true that we are promised rewards and encouraged to expect them, and it is true that it is not wrong to be motivated toward this end, but this does not add up to Piper's Christian Hedonism.

It is also true that the New Testament says much about the "joy of the Lord" in the Christian life, but it is important to understand that joy is not the same as the emotional happiness so sought after by the world. There is much happiness in the Christian life, but it is an error to think that this is solely what the Bible means by joy and rejoicing. 2 Corinthians 6:10 says, "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing". 1 Peter 1:6 says, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations". Jesus Christ, who was anointed with the oil of gladness (Heb. 1:9), was also "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3).

From these Scriptures it is evident that one can be joyful even when emotionally sorrowful, even when the spirit is heavy, even when one is acquainted with grief. **CHRISTIAN JOY AND REJOICING IS, ABOVE ALL ELSE, STEADFAST CONFIDENCE IN GOD REGARDLESS OF ONE'S CIRCUMSTANCES.** This is evident in the use of the Greek words. The same Greek word translated "joy" in Rom. 5:11 (*kauchaomai*) is also translated "glory" (Rom. 5:3), "rejoice" (Rom. 5:2), and "boast" (Rom. 2:17, 23; 3:27; 2 Cor. 11:16). To boast or glory in Christ and the promises of God is rejoicing!

There is a great danger in identifying Christian joy solely with emotional pleasure, with a spiritual gaiety. Because of the fallen condition of this evil world and of our own corrupted nature, it is impossible but that we will experience a great deal of grief and heaviness in the present life. The great Apostle Paul said, "... even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23). God does not promise to deliver the Christian from the pains of a fallen creation. There are those who would require the Christian to try to maintain an emotional exuberance, but this flies in the face of the Word of God. James 5:13 says, "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms". Here the Word of God recognizes that there will be different emotional experiences among the members of a church at any given time, and it does not demand that all conform to a single euphoric standard. The afflicted one is not told to be merry; he is told to pray.



In fact, to the worldly Christian, the one who has become a friend to the world, who is rejoicing in fleshly merriment, the Apostle James says, "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness" (James 4:4, 9). This is apt exhortation for the present lust-living generation of Christians which are described in 2 Timothy 4:3-4.

The fullness and perfection of emotional happiness is something that belongs to the future when the believer will bask in the eternal glory of Christ in Heaven and the "old man" will be gone and we will have a resurrection body.

We must not make it our chief aim in this present world to seek such joy, or we will be severely disappointed. Like Jesus, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Heb. 12:2), the child of God must set his face like a flint to endure the manifold sufferings of this present life with his eyes focused on the unspeakable joy which is to come; he must refuse to be sidetracked by a vain search for emotional euphoria in the here and now.

Happiness comes and goes in this present life. It is not something that should be pursued. The Psalms are filled with descriptions of melancholy and hardship. In Psalm 119 alone, we find the following conditions: the man of God's soul breaks for longing (v. 20), melts for heaviness (v. 28), is filled with horror (v. 53), faints for salvation (v. 81), is dried up like a leather bottle in the smoke (v. 83). He is almost consumed (v. 87), is near perishing in affliction (v. 92), is afflicted very much (v. 107). His soul is continually in his hand (v. 109); his flesh trembles for fear (v. 120); his eyes fail for salvation (v. 123). Rivers of waters run down his eyes (v. 136). He is consumed by zeal (v. 139), taken hold with trouble and anguish (v. 143), in need of deliverance from affliction (v. 153). He has many persecutors and enemies (v. 157); is persecuted without a cause (v. 161); is gone astray like a lost sheep (v. 176).

The Bible's description of the Christian life in this present world strongly emphasizes the trouble and persecution aspect.

The fullness of happiness is described more in connection with the next life rather than the present. This present life is described more in context of trouble than happiness. Romans 8 contrasts "the sufferings of this present time" with the glory that will follow in the next life. In this passage Paul describes the Christian life in terms of "sufferings" (v. 18), "waiting" (v. 19), "subject to vanity" (v. 20), "bondage of corruption" (v. 21), "groaning and travailing in pain" (v. 22), "groaning without ourselves" (v. 23), "waiting for the adoption" (v. 23).

If happiness, even happiness in God, were the chief element of the present Christian life, Paul would not have said that were it not for the resurrection and the future life he is all men most miserable (1 Corinthians 15:19).

It is possible to find proof texts to support Piper's emphasis on happiness that is found in the pursuit of God, but it is not supported by the overall teaching and emphasis of the New Testament.

## **THE FOUNDATIONAL ERROR**

The central error of Christian Hedonism is that it is not developed from Scripture but is read into Scripture. In *Desiring God* Piper operates an upside down principle of exegesis. He first defines his doctrine from human writings then goes to Scripture to prove it. He builds his case for Christian Hedonism from the writings of Blaise Pascal, C.S. Lewis, Jonathan Edwards, and others, and only afterwards does he go to Scripture for support. Throughout the rest of his book he assumes the truth of Christian Hedonism and speaks of it as an established doctrine.

He speaks, for example, of "this fact--that praise means consummate pleasure and that the highest end of man is to drink deeply of this pleasure". But this is presumption, because he has not established directly from Scripture that this is a fact.

If the reader accepts that Piper has proven the truth of his doctrine, then he will not properly critique the proof texts he offers. This is how false teachers handle the Bible, and it is very effective because most people are not grounded in the principles of sound interpretation, such as examining the context, comparing Scripture with Scripture, and examining doctrine in the light of Scripture as a whole.

Like all heresies, Christian Hedonism is based on proof texts rather than the whole tenure of Scripture. If Christian Hedonism were so true and so important, there would be many passages in the New Testament epistles that would lay it out with perfect clarity, but in fact nowhere do the writers of Scripture offer Christian Hedonism as the “essence” or “secret” of Christian living.

Peter Masters says,

“I do not for a moment suggest that his use of Scripture is devious or manipulative, but he is clearly so carried along by his vision that he sees corroboration where it is not to be seen”.

Sincere or not, manipulative or not, the effect is the same, and the Word of God warns, “And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully” (2 Timothy 2:5). We must rightly, lawfully divide the Scripture (2 Tim. 2:15), and taking it out of context and shoehorning one’s pre-conceived theology into passages is not the lawful way.

## **PIPER’S TEACHING NOT PURE**

This problem runs throughout Piper’s teaching. There are many good, biblical statements. Consider the following, for example:

“Are we to throw the kindling of God’s Word every day on the fire of joy? Indeed, we are! Not only every day, but day and night. ... Oh, that we might not treat the Bible as a trifle! If we do, we oppose ourselves and despise the saints who labored and suffered for the Word of God” (Desiring God, location 2743).

We could cite many good statements like this, but the teaching is interspersed with human reasoning that is contrary to Scripture, verses taken out of context, and citations from heretics in such a manner that the heretic is recommended, whether it’s C.S. Lewis, Dietrich Bonhoeffer (who Piper calls “God’s gift to my generation of students”), Daniel Fuller, Karl Barth, Ayn Rand, Augustine, or someone else. Piper throws psychoheresy, contemplative mysticism, and many other errors into the theological stew.

In 2008 Piper promoted the Roman Catholic G.K. Chesterton in an article entitled “How A Roman Catholic Anti-Calvinist Can Serve Today’s Post-Calvinists”. Piper said, “I celebrate his birthday by recommending his book *Orthodoxy*”. Piper delights in Chesterton’s “celebration of poetry and paradox”. This is an emerging church concept that is promoted by heretics such as Brian McLaren, who claim that doctrinal stances that appear contradictory can be held together as mutually acceptable. It is syncretism. It is Hegelian dialectics. There is no excuse for Piper to promote Chesterton in any sense whatsoever. Not only did Chesterton preach Rome’s ancient sacramental heresies, he accepted theistic evolution (*Orthodoxy*, p. 30).

Piper’s teaching isn’t pure. The trumpet doesn’t give a certain sound. There is great spiritual danger here.

## **HEDONISM?**

Piper surely knows the implications of the term “hedonism” in this apostate age in which the predominant form of Christianity is the self-loving, lustful-living kind described in 2 Timothy 3:1-2 and 4:3-4:

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves ... For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables”.

In spite of this, Piper has persisted doggedly in calling his doctrine “Christian Hedonism”.

He says, “This does not mean that God is the means to help us get worldly pleasures”, but the doctrine is so subtle and the heart is so deceitful and the flesh is so powerful and the apostasy so deep that it can easily be so construed.

Piper has not clearly distinguished his “hedonism” from rock & roll Christianity. In fact, his church is deeply involved with this worldliness. He has not reproved the emerging church’s “cultural liberalism”. Rather, he has joined hands with Mark Driscoll, the king of cultural liberalism, in a Desiring God conference. He has not reproved Rick Warren’s many heresies. Rather, he has conducted a Desiring God conference at Warren’s Saddleback Church.

In its fruit, John Piper’s Christian Hedonism has far more in common with the apostate Christianity of 2 Timothy 4:3-4 than with Pauline Christianity.

## Part II

### CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP

John Piper and Bethlehem Baptist Church have capitulated completely to contemporary rock worship. On a visit to a Sunday morning service in 2011 I witnessed this firsthand. The worship at Bethlehem is no different from the worship I have witnessed on research trips to the most radical charismatic and ecumenical forums. It is pure rock & roll. It is ecumenical in emphasis with a focus on “the whole church” united in service and worship, but that encompasses a world of heresy and compromise, even among “evangelicals” themselves, not to speak of the emergents, modernists, Romanists, Greek Orthodox, etc. The contemporary lyrics that were used at Bethlehem were typically shallow and repetitive. Contemporary worship is very sensual with an emphasis on “feeling” and experience and yielding to the power of the music itself.

Nothing today is more effective in weakening the stance of a staunch Bible-believing church and promoting ecumenical unity and tolerance of error than contemporary worship music. It is a bridge both to the secular world and to the “broader church” with all of its spiritual dangers.

### A KEY TO SANCTIFICATION?

In contrast to Piper’s idea that there is one “key” to sanctification, the Bible presents a multiple approach.

The following critique by Peter Masters identifies this error:

“Christian Hedonism says that the pursuit of happiness in God is the overruling source of power and energy for the life of the Christian. ... delighting in God is the pivotal issue in the Christian walk; the central and most important part of the life of faith. ... Delighting in God is made the organising principle for every other spiritual experience and duty. It becomes the key formula for all spiritual vigour and development. Every other Christian duty is thought to depend on how well we obey this central duty of delighting in the Lord. The entire Christian life is simplified to rest upon a single quest, which is bound to distort one’s perception of the Christian life and how it must be lived.

“[Piper’s attempt] to oversimplify biblical sanctification is doomed to failure because the biblical method for sanctification and spiritual advance consists of a number of strands or pathways of action, and all must receive individual attention. As soon as you substitute a single big idea or organising principle, and bundle all the strands into one, you alter God’s design and method. Vital aspects of Truth and conduct will go by the board to receive little or no attention. ...

“You cannot reorganise the Lord’s way of accomplishing the fruits of godliness without many duties being swept out of view. Single-principle systems do not intend to cause harm, but, inevitably, they do. To borrow a piece of modern scientific jargon, biblical sanctification is a system of irreducible complexity. Not that it is too complicated--having only seven or eight well-known component virtues which must all be kept to the fore in ministry” (Peter Masters, “Christian Hedonism - Is It Right? *Sword & Trowel*, 2002, No. 3).

There are indeed many aspects to spiritual victory and neither Christ nor the writers of the New Testament epistles ever present it as any one thing.

If there were any one “key”, we can be sure that Christ would have described it.

Perhaps the closest He comes to such a thing is John 15, where the “key” would be abiding in Him, but this is not offered as the sum of the Christian life or the one overarching key.

As for the apostles, if there were any one “key”, we can be sure that they would have described it in precise and clear terms to the oft-struggling first century churches and they would have emphasized it in the Pastoral Epistles to the preachers who were in the midst of the battle. But we look in vain for a presentation of Christian Hedonism or any other “key”.

Consider examples from Peter and from Paul:

## **2 Peter 1**

Here Peter summarizes the way of spiritual victory and eternal fruit, and he mentions many elements. There is the trusting of the precious promises of God (v. 4). There is the diligent pursuit of spiritual growth by building on the foundation of faith to add virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity (vv. 5-7). There is the abounding in these things (v. 8). By these means Peter assures us that we will make our calling and election sure and an entrance will be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of Christ (vv. 10-11).

## **Ephesians 4-6**

In Ephesians 1-3 Paul lays out the doctrinal foundation of the Christian life. He describes the believer’s eternal and unchanging position in Christ. In Ephesians 4-6 he turns to Christian living in this present world. There is no one “secret”, no one “key” or “essence”. Rather, Paul lays out many elements of spiritual victory and fruitfulness. We are to walk worthy of our calling (4:1), forbear one another in love (4:2), and endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit (4:3). There is the necessity of submitting to the ministry-gifted men God has given to the churches for nurturing and protection (Eph. 4:11-16). We are to cease walking according to the way of the unsaved, to put off the old man and his ways and put on the new man (Eph. 4:17 - 5:15). We are to walk circumspectly (Eph. 5:15), to redeem the time (Eph. 5:16), to understand God’s will (Eph. 5:17), to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), to sing Psalms and give thanks (Eph. 5:19-20), to submit ourselves one to another in the fear of God (Eph. 5:21). Wives are to submit to their husbands and husbands are to love their wives (Eph. 5:22-33). Children are to obey their parents and fathers are to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord and servants are to be obedient to their masters and masters are to forbear threatening (Eph. 6:1-9). We are to put on the whole armor of God and thereby stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:10-20).

We could look at the epistles of Romans, Galatians, Corinthians, James, 1 John, and we would find the same thing. Nowhere do we find one fundamental essence of Christian living. Instead, there are many elements of victory, many spiritual and moral responsibilities.

## **Romans 6-8**

The theme of this passage is sanctification, and Paul describes many different things that are necessary for Christian growth and victory. We are to reckon ourselves dead with Christ and alive unto God (Rom. 6:11). We are to refuse to yield our bodies to unrighteous, but we are to yield our bodies to righteousness (Rom. 6:13). We are to walk after the Spirit rather than the flesh (Rom. 8:4). We are to mortify the works of the flesh by the Spirit (Rom. 8:13).

It’s true that Jesus summarized the whole Law into two principles:

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40).

This is the essence of the Law of Moses, not the essence of victorious Christian living. The Law is the schoolmaster to lead men to the Gospel, but the Law is not the Gospel (Galatians 3:24). The Law is death to the sinner because it demands perfection, but the Gospel is life because Christ is our Perfection. For the essence of victorious Christian living we must look to the New Testament epistles, and when we do we never see a statement of Christian Hedonism held forth as an important key.

There are also many right motives for the service of the Lord, not just the one that Piper develops, which is to joy in God. That is indeed a great and high motive, but if it were the essence and sum of proper Christian living, the New Testament would not speak of so many other proper motives. Piper says it should not be “duty for duty’s sake, or right for right’s sake” (*Desiring God*, Kindle location 2134), but he is wrong. It is legitimate before God to serve Him at times just for the sake of duty and right. Sometimes that’s all we are left with while living in this sin-drenched world in a “body of death”, and it is not an illegitimate motive.

Sometimes I have my daily devotions with God and His Word out of a sense of great passion for Christ; sometimes I do it simply because I know it is necessary for spiritual growth and protection from the devil; sometimes I just do it simply because I know I should. None of these are wrong motives.

For example, in 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul urges the believers to contribute to an offering for the needy saints who were in the throes of a famine. If Piper was right and if the pursuit of joy in God was the only genuine essence of proper Christian motivation, Paul would indicate this, but he doesn’t. Instead, he offers several different motives that would please God. In giving, we are to give ourselves to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:5). We are to minister to the needs of needy saints (2 Cor. 8:4). We are to work out the grace of God (2 Cor. 8:7). We are to prove the sincerity of our love (2 Cor. 8:8, 24). We are to follow Christ’s example (2 Cor. 8:9). We are to seek an equality (2 Cor. 8:13-15). We are to encourage the hearts of Christian leaders (2 Cor. 8:24; 9:3-4). We are to sow in expectation of a reward (2 Cor. 9:6-10). All of these are proper motivations for giving.

## **PRESUMPTION IN EXEGESIS**

Piper displays a frightful presumption in his exegesis.

Consider his statement, “The chief end of God is to glorify God and to enjoy himself forever”.

Piper is claiming that God is a Hedonist in His own right! His first proof for this is Psalm 115:3. “But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased”.

Piper says, “The implication of this text is that God has the right and power to do whatever makes him happy”.

But the verse says nothing about God’s happiness. Piper shoehorns that into the verse from his preconceived doctrine. It is presumption.

Piper then says:

“Think about it for a moment. If God is sovereign and can do anything he pleases, then none of his purposes can be frustrated. ... and if none of his purposes can be frustrated then he must be the happiest of all beings”.

I don’t doubt that God is a happy being, but that is neither here nor there. The passages that Piper cites as evidence for his “God is a Hedonist” doctrine prove no such thing.

He then says:

“The foundation of the happiness of God is the sovereignty of God ... If so much hangs on God’s sovereignty, we should make sure the biblical basis for it is secure”.

He then goes on to demonstrate from Scripture that God is sovereign, but by so doing he proves nothing about his doctrine of divine Hedonism. This is a bait and switch tactic.

Nowhere in Scripture are we taught that “The chief end of God is to glorify God and to enjoy himself forever”. It might be true; it might not be true, but we cannot make a doctrine of it because it is not supported by divine Revelation, and Piper’s use of Scripture to prove it is frightfully presumptuous.

Thus, the foundational error of Christian Hedonism is simply that it is not solidly established upon a Bible foundation, and this is certainly enough to reject it.

For those wanting to establish their Christian lives upon a solid foundation of truth I recommend the apostolic epistles; I do *not* recommend John Piper's books.

## **MISREPRESENTING THE PURITANS AND OLD PROTESTANTS**

For proof of Christian Hedonism, Piper cites Jonathan Edwards, the Westminster Confession, and the Heidelberg Catechism.

He even claims that the "entire Heidelberg Catechism is structured the way Christian Hedonism would structure it".

He juxtaposes his statements with quotes from Jonathan Edwards, but he takes Edwards out of context of his overall preaching just as he does the Bible.

In fact, the Puritans would have sharply reproved him and his broader Christian rock, charismatic, emerging associations. For Piper to place himself in the lineage of the old Protestants is not only wrong; it is ridiculous; his soft, hedonistic approach is definitely a new type of Protestantism.

Peter Masters, who occupies the actual pastorate of that old-time Calvinist Charles Spurgeon and who *does* stand in the place of the old Protestants, reproves Piper and his Christian Hedonism.

"At times in his books Dr. Piper wants us to see this as an old idea, but his claims are not convincing. It does tend to look no older than C.S. Lewis. ... Dr. Piper often quotes Jonathan Edwards, who said much about delighting in God and Christian joy. By reference to Jonathan Edwards, Dr. Piper effectively says, look, this is as old as the hills. This is the way our forebears thought. Certainly Jonathan Edwards provides choice passages about delighting in God as did the English Puritan writers, BUT AT NO TIME DOES HE FRAME A SYSTEM IN WHICH THIS BECOMES THE KEY PRINCIPLE OF CHRISTIAN LIVING. JOY IN GOD ALWAYS SITS ALONGSIDE OTHER EQUAL DUTIES.

"Although Dr. Piper seeks to root his system in the past, he seems at the same time well aware that it is a brand new idea. Frequently, he virtually admits it by using the language of innovation, and saying, in so many words, This is explosive; this is stunning; this is radical; this is dangerous. He even uses the term 'my vision', and that is what it is, for however well intended, it is Dr. Piper's personal vision. He also calls it 'my theology'. Dr. Piper's publisher calls his book a paradigm-shattering work" (Peter Masters, "Christian Hedonism - Is It Right?" *Sword & Trowel*, 2002, No. 3).

## **COMPLICATED THEOLOGY**

There is infinite depth to the Scripture, because it is the eternal Word of God, but there is also a practical simplicity to Bible truth, because it is geared to the weak and poor of this present world, whom God has chosen rich in faith (Matthew 11:25; 1 Corinthians 1:26-27; James 2:5).

The apostle Paul warned that it is the devil who corrupts the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3).

Piper admits that his doctrine is not simple.

"I know this is perplexing at first glance so I will try to take it apart piece by piece then put it back together".

"... fresh ways of looking at the world ... do not lend themselves to simple definitions. A whole book is needed so people can begin to catch on".

"This is a subtle thing".

Consider the following statement, which is very typical:

"In other words, yes, love is more than feelings; but, no love is not less than feelings".

What does that mean, exactly? Who knows? It is too complicated, too obtuse, too easily misunderstood. Piper even admits, "This is liable to be misunderstood". Indeed, it is, and that is because it is not the simplicity of sound Bible truth.

After having studied (not merely read) two of Piper's major books on Christian Hedonism and still having difficulty putting his theology into simple terms, and I have a suspicion that he would say that I haven't gotten it right.

I say, though, that if a theology is so complicated and convoluted that it cannot be understood properly by a reasonably intelligent preacher even after hours of study, then it is not Scriptural.

I have been preaching the gospel and discipling believers in Christian living for nearly 40 years, and the doctrines of salvation and sanctification that I hold from God's Word can be taught to hillbillies in the hills of Tennessee where I began my preaching career and to the members of our churches in Nepal, many of whom are illiterate.

## **PSYCHOHERESY**

Piper is at least dabbling in psychoheresy, which is the infiltration of the principles of humanistic psychology into the churches through the Christian counseling movement.

For example, he treats sin as "disease".

"Affluent America has virtually invented a whole new set of diseases: obesity, arteriosclerosis, heart disease, strokes, lung cancer, venereal disease, cirrhosis of the liver, drug addiction, alcoholism, divorce, battered children, suicide, murder" (*Desiring God*, location 3633).

Drug addiction, alcoholism, child abuse, divorce, suicide, and murder are *not* diseases!

The influence of psychoheresy is also evident in his exhortation that the husband "submit to your wife's deep desires" (*Desiring God*, location 3951). The husband is to love his wife, but to submit to her deep desires is a recipe for frustration and confusion.

Considering the extent to which psychoheresy has permeated evangelicalism and Piper's rejection of "separatism", I have no doubt that this theme will be evident in his other writings.

For more about this see Dr. E.S. Williams' important books *Christ or Therapy?* and *The Dark Side of Christian Counselling*. Williams is a medical doctor and a member of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, England.

## **CATHOLIC-CHARISMATIC MYSTICISM**

Piper mentions Catholic mystic Bernard of Clairvaux and charismatic mystic Graham Kendrick and says the mystics are the most "God-besotted people in the world" (*Desiring God*, Kindle location 1815-1826).

This is a powerful and deeply wrong-headed recommendation of mysticism.

While Piper gives an uncertain sound in the matter of contemplative prayer (hinting, for example, in a blog dated May 22, 2010, that Roman Catholic mysticism might be wrong), the fact remains that he recommends Bernard of Clairvaux, who is a Roman Catholic saint and a rabid heretic. Bernard authored the book *Homilies in Praise of the Virgin Mother*, calling Mary the Queen of Heaven, the Star, the ladder on which sinners may climb to God, the royal road to God, the channel through whom divine life flows to the whole creation.

"Bernard played the leading role in the development of the Virgin cult, which is one of the most important manifestations of the popular piety of the twelfth century" (Norman Cantor, *The Civilization of the Middle Ages*, 1993, p. 341).

Bernard was a fierce opponent of the Bible believers who refused to submit to the pope, persecuting them in southern France. These separatist Christians were called Petrobrusians and Henricians after the name of two of their leaders, Peter of Bruys (Peter de Bruis) and Henry of Lausanne. Peter was arrested, brutally imprisoned, and burned at the stake in 1126 during Bernard's lifetime. Henry of Lausanne was arrested in 1134 and condemned to imprisonment in Bernard's monastery at Clairvaux.

Piper would have us believe that “Saint” Bernard was a “God-besotted person”. It is more likely that he was demon possessed.

Piper also recommends Graham Kendrick as a “God-besotted” mystic. Kendrick is a charismatic Christian rocker of the most radical sort and promotes the heretical “kingdom now” theology and Word faith doctrines. He is a member of the Ichthus Christian Fellowship and welcomed the so-called Toronto Blessing with its spirit slaying, hysterical laughing, barking, braying, rolling. Graham claims that he was “baptized with the Holy Spirit” in 1971 after attending a charismatic meeting. He says, “It was later that night when I was cleaning my teeth ready to go to bed that I was filled with the Holy Spirit! ... and I remember lying at last in my bed, the fixed grin still on my face, praising and thanking God, and gingerly trying out a new spiritual language that had presented itself to my tongue with no regard at all for the objections thrown up by my incredulous brain! ... That was a real watershed in my Christian experience” (Nigel Smyth, “What Are We All Singing About?” <http://www.freedomministries.org.uk/ccm/nsmyth1.shtml>). This “new spiritual language” was meaningless gibberish and nothing like the miraculous tongue-languages of the apostolic age.

One of Kendrick’s objectives is to break down denominational barriers and create the broadest ecumenical unity. He was the co-founder of March for Jesus, which has brought together every type of denomination and cult including Roman Catholic and Mormon. A biography at Kendrick’s web site boasts: “Crossing international and denominational barriers, his songs, like the popular ‘Shine Jesus Shine’, have been used from countless small church events to major festivals--including Promise Keeper rallies, Billy Graham crusades and a four million-strong open air mass in the Philippines capital Manila, where the Pope ‘swung his cane in time to the music’.”

Few things are more spiritually dangerous today than charismatic mysticism, yet Piper recommends one of its chief proponents as a “God-besotted” individual his readers should emulate.

Again, John Piper’s Christian Hedonism has not given him even fundamental spiritual discernment when it comes to the heresies of our day.

## **MEDDLING WITH THINGS TOO HIGH**

Piper tries to answer questions not answered clearly in the Bible and seeks to create a systemic theology with those answers.

For example, how can God be sovereign and not be the author of sin? How can God be grieved at sin and not be frustrated at what men do?

The attempt to answer such things is a foundational error of Calvinistic theology.

Consider some of Piper’s statements:

“What we have seen so far is that God is absolutely sovereign over the world and he can do anything he pleases, and he therefore is not a frustrated God, but a deeply happy God”.

Piper goes beyond what the Bible teaches about God’s sovereignty and adds his own human thinking, which is exceedingly dangerous.

“Why is it that contemplating the mosaic of redemptive history delights the heart of God? Is this not idolatry--for God to delight in something other than Himself? ... So now we must ask what does make God happy? ... If we could discover what one thing God pursues in everything he does, we would know what delights him most. ... My own conclusion is that God’s glory is uppermost in his own affections. ... He delights in his glory above all things... God’s ultimate goal is to preserve and display His infinite and awesome greatness and wrath, that is, His glory. God has many other goals in what He does. But none of them is more ultimate than this. They are all subordinate. God’s overwhelming passion is to exalt the value of His glory. ... He loves His glory infinitely. ... God would be unrighteous (just as we would) if He valued anything more than what is supremely valuable. But He Himself is supremely valuable. If He did not take infinite delight in the worth of His own glory, He would be unrighteous. ... Within the triune Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), God has been uppermost in His own affections for all eternity. ... God loves to behold His glory



reflected in His works. ... People do not like to hear that God is uppermost in His own affections” (Kindle location, 589-614, 628, 672).

This is human reasoning. It is presumptuous. It is meddling in things much too high for man and things not clearly revealed in Scripture.

I would advise John Piper and anyone considering his theology to heed Deuteronomy 29:29:

“The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law”.

## **AN OVER-EMPHASIS ON EMOTIONS IN WORSHIP**

Piper’s emphasis on emotions in worship is extremely dangerous and plays into the hands of the contemporary worship movement and its charismatic mysticism.

“Worship is authentic when affections for God arise in the heart as an end in themselves” (Piper, *Desiring God*, Kindle location 1586).

“Worship is a way of gladly reflecting back to God the radiance of His worth. This cannot be done by mere acts of duty. It can only be done when spontaneous affections arise in the heart” (location 1586).

“The engagement of the heart in worship is the coming alive of the feelings and emotions and affections of the heart. Where feelings for God are dead worship is dead. True worship must include inward feelings that reflect the worth of God’s glory” (location 1498).

“It also becomes clear why it is not idolatrous or man-centered to say that our emotions are ends in themselves. It is not man-centered because the emotions of our worship are centered on God” (location 1630).

While we are opposed to dead, spiritually-lifeless worship, Piper’s emphasis on the emotions is dangerous because of the deception and inherent selfishness of the human heart. It is so easy to think that I am worshiping the true God when I am actually worshiping something else, even myself.

It is especially dangerous because of the emotion-manipulating power of modern worship music, which is designed to produce the very emotions that Piper encourages. It uses heavily syncopated dance rhythms, unresolving chords, repetitious lyrics, the rise and fall of the sound level, and other elements to manipulate emotions. True sacred music doesn’t do this. It fortifies the message of the lyrics, but it doesn’t overwhelm the lyrics. It feeds the mind more than the emotions, the heart more than the body.

Piper’s emphasis on emotions is wrong because the Bible teaches that true worship involves many elements including obedience for obedience’s sake and acts of obedience that involve pain and even deep sorrow.

Consider Abraham walking toward Mt. Moriah with Isaac. He had determined to offer his beloved son to God in obedience to the divine command, in one of the greatest acts of worship recorded in Scripture, but there is no evidence that the journey was characterized by happiness.

Consider Job sitting in an ash heap scrapping his sores with a piece of broken pottery in the deepest grief and confusion at the loss of his children and his fortune and station in life. When Job disregarded his wife’s counsel to curse God and instead bowed before his Creator and said, “the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD”, that was one of the greatest acts of worship ever recorded. Yet there is clear evidence that Job was *not* happy.

While the Bible sometimes mentions the emotions as an aspect of worship there is no *emphasis* on emotions as with Piper.

True Christian worship is not high emotion; it is living by faith in God’s Word.

“Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, NOT BY SIGHT)” (2 Corinthians 5:6-7).

“For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it” (Romans 8:24-25).

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).

George Muller nailed it when he said:

“Faith has nothing to do with feelings or with impressions, with improbabilities or with outward experiences. If we desire to couple such things with faith, then we are no longer resting on the Word of God, because faith needs nothing of the kind. Faith rests on the naked Word of God. When we take Him at His Word, the heart is at peace”.

Former contemporary worship leader Dan Lucarini, author of *Why I Left the Contemporary Christian Music Movement*, says, “When we try to feel an experience of affirmation from worship, we are not worshipping God; we are worshipping our own egos. The true heart of worship is the heart that bows before God and submits to his Word, no more and no less”.

With his emphasis on emotions, Piper plays right into the hands of the charismatic movement and doubtless encourages confusion in those wanting to worship God acceptably. I recall as a new believer coming out of a very licentious, drug-abusing lifestyle how depressed I still was. This confused me because I was visiting Pentecostal-charismatic churches and was being pressured to “be happy” and to worship God exuberantly. I tried, but it was an act. Then one day I read James 5:13.

“Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms”.

I was so encouraged by this, because I saw that God didn’t require that I be happy if I wasn’t happy! James expected that the believers would represent different emotional conditions in any church service, and if a believer is afflicted, he is not told to be merry.

## CONFUSION ABOUT SALVATION

### 1. Piper teaches the heresy that regeneration precedes faith.

“... when we hear the gospel, we will never respond positively unless God performs the miracle of regeneration. ... We must first experience the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. ... John teaches most clearly that regeneration precedes and enables faith. ... Faith is the effect of new birth, not the cause of it. ... New birth comes first and enables the repentance and faith of conversion. Before new birth we are dead, and dead men don’t meet conditions. Regeneration is totally unconditional. It is owing solely to the free grace of God” (Desiring God, Kindle location 1007-1067).

This is based on human reasoning, which goes as follows: Men are dead in sins; therefore, they can’t believe and they can’t believe unless they are regenerated. On the other hand, while the Bible does teach that the unsaved are dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1), it also says these men *can* believe. Nowhere does the Bible say that men are born again before they believe. Everywhere in the New Testament men are commanded to believe and salvation is said to follow faith.

The best proof text that Piper offers for this doctrine is a the very liberal New Revised Standard Version translation of 1 John 5:1 --

“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ *has been* born of God” (*Desiring God*, location 1055).

Practically every other major version reads the same as the King James:

KJV - “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God..”.

ASV - “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is begotten of God..”.

WEB - “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God..”.

NIV - “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God..”.

NASV - “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God..”.

But even if the NRSV's translation of 1 John 5:1 was legitimate, it doesn't say that regeneration precedes faith. One has to read that into the verse, and it is contrary to the teaching of many clear passages of Scripture, such as the following:

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:16-18).

"And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:36-37).

"To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43).

"And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:30-31).

Had the apostle Paul held Piper's doctrine, he would have answered the Philippian jailer's question differently or he would have refused to have answered it at all, since there would be absolutely nothing a sinner could do to assure his salvation. He could only hope that he was elect and that God would regenerate him so that he could believe.

Consider some more verses that teach that faith is "the hand that reaches out to receive salvation" and that faith is not preceded by regeneration:

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16).

"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference" (Romans 3:21-22).

"But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:8-13).

"But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Romans 4:5).

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13).

Piper's Calvinist idea that faith itself is a work is not based on Scripture, which says faith is the opposite of works (Ephesians 2:8-9). Faith is the hand that reaches out to accept the gift that God offers in Christ.

(For more on this see "The Calvinism Debate" at the Way of Life web site.)

## **2. Piper confuses sanctification and the pursuit of God with conversion.**

“The pursuit of joy in God is not optional. It is not an ‘extra’ that a person might grow into after he comes to faith. It is not simply a way to ‘enhance’ your walk with the Lord. Until your heart has hit upon this pursuit, your ‘faith’ cannot please God. It is not saving faith. Saving faith is the confidence that if you sell all you have and forsake all sinful pleasures, the hidden treasure of holy joy will satisfy your deepest desires. Saving faith is the heartfelt conviction not only that Christ is reliable, but also that He is desirable” (*Desiring God*, location 1180).

Piper quotes Matthew 13:44 as support for this view of salvation.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field”.

Piper says: “This parable describes how someone is converted and brought into the kingdom of heaven. A person discovers a treasure and is impelled by joy to sell all that he has in order to have this treasure”. He says further, “Saving faith also receives Christ as our Treasure. A non-treasured Christ is a non-saving Christ. Faith has in it this element of valuing, embracing, prizing, relishing Christ. It is like a man who finds a treasure hidden in a field and ‘from joy’ sells all his treasures to have that field (Matthew 13:44)” (location 1543).

I realize that many commentators see this as a parable about salvation, but it makes no sense. If the parable refers to the sinner and salvation, then it is saying that salvation is achieved by works, which cannot be, and it would also be saying that salvation is hidden but it is not. It is proclaimed openly to every nation. No, the words are plain. The parable is not talking about the gospel; it is talking about the kingdom, which is an entirely different thing. Christ is the one who has sold everything for the establishment of the kingdom. This is clear from the parable of the pearls, which follows in Matthew 13:45-46.

To make a rather obscure parable a centerpiece of one’s theology about salvation, which is exactly what Piper does in *Desiring God* chapters 2 and 3, is another example of his misuse of Scripture.

## **INTO THE ARMS OF ECUMENISM, CHARISMATICISM, AND THE EMERGING CHURCH**

Far from protecting Piper from evil, Christian Hedonism has led him into the arms of the ecumenical movement, the charismatic movement, and the emerging church.

Instead of reproving Billy and Franklin Graham and their ecumenical evangelism, he has praised them and speaks in forums with them.

For example, he was a speaker at the 2004 National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) conference in Charlotte, North Carolina, joining hands in that forum with Franklin Graham, James Dobson, Ted Haggard, and Pat Robertson, all of whom have a close relationship with the Roman Catholic Church. Graham follows in his father’s footsteps in turning converts over to the Catholic Church. Dobson has appeared on the cover of Catholic magazines and to our knowledge has never warned his many Catholic listeners to come out of Rome. Robertson wrote the foreword to *A House United? Evangelicals and Catholics Together: A Winning Alliance for the 21st Century* (NavPress, 1994). He praised Roman Catholic Keith Fournier for his “deep dedication to helping to heal the divide” that “separated the Body of Christ”. Three years earlier Robertson invited Fournier to be the executive director of the American Center for Law and Justice at Regent University. Haggard, who was then Senior Pastor of New Life Church in Colorado Springs and president of the National Association of Evangelicals, said in October 2005: “New Life doesn’t try to ‘convert’ Catholics” and “the church would never discourage its members from becoming Catholic or attending Catholic Mass” (*The Berean Call*, Jan. 2006). Three Roman Catholic organizations were active at the 2004 NRB conference. The Global Catholic Network ran an ad in the NRB newspaper each day and rented exhibit space. Priests for Life handed out packets of their material; and Catholic Answers, which promotes Roman Catholic dogma, also participated.

Dr. Ralph Colas, who wrote an eyewitness report of the meeting, concluded:

“This year some speakers, like John Piper, had more Bible content than is usually presented at NRB conventions. However, not one identified the apostates, Roman Catholicism as well as those who

embrace extra-biblical revelations and dreams, as being a threat to the people of God. As it is so often at such new evangelical meetings, it is not necessarily what they say--but what they fail to say that creates the confusion and further compromise. The NRB continues to be a hodgepodge of believers and unbelievers, and its broad inclusivism reveals it fits exactly in the center of the new evangelical camp”.

Piper even supports the heretical charismatic spirit-slaking phenomena. He took his staff to a “Toronto-style” meeting and admitted that “a whole bunch of my staff went down” (“John Piper: Hedonist Theologian?” *Faith and Freedom* magazine, Dec. 2006).

Piper said: “I simply know of too many people’s lives who have been profoundly helped for good by lying on the ground for forty-five minutes in a kind of laughter or peace” (tape of Question and Answer Session at conference in Minneapolis, Jan. 31, 1996).

Piper also invited a Vineyard Church pastor to minister in a leadership training session and “he just knocked everybody off their seats”.

Perhaps the clearest evidence of Piper’s spiritual blindness is his close and non-critical relationship with Rick Warren, who is a case study in the emerging church. In April 2011, Piper conducted a *Desiring God* conference at Warren’s Saddleback Church. Piper is also scheduled to join Warren on the preaching docket at the annual Southern Baptist Pastor’s Conference in June 2011.

Warren preaches the heretical “judge not” philosophy; turns the church into a rock & roll entertainment center complete with pelvic thrusts; says God won’t ask about your doctrinal views; continually and approvingly quotes from heretics in his writings and preaching (such as Roman Catholic universalists Mother Teresa, Henri Nouwen, and Thomas Merton); promotes Catholic contemplative mysticism; likens Christian fundamentalists to Islamic terrorists; calls for unity between Baptists, Roman Catholics, Pentecostals, Anglicans, etc.; promotes the exceedingly liberal Baptist World Alliance; yokes together with New Age practitioners; says that believers should work with unbelievers and pagan religionists to build the kingdom of God; and presents Roman Catholic one-worlder Tony Blair with a peace prize (March 2011). For documentation see <http://www.wayoflife.org/database/warrenheader.html>

## **THE ATTRACTION FOR INDEPENDENT BAPTISTS?**

What is the attraction of John Piper for fundamentalists and Independent Baptists?

### **Intellectualism**

Piper has depth; he is a student, a thinker. His readers find themselves intellectually satisfied. They are given something of substance to think about. In light of the shallowness that tends to characterize much of the Independent Baptist movement, it is not surprising that many would be attracted to Piper’s intellectualism.

### **Exaltation of God**

Instead of a man-centered theology, Piper’s theology is God-centered. This is why he comes down on the right side of the issue of hell. He understands the holiness and justice of God (*Desiring God*, Kindle location 949-963).

### **Cultural Liberalism**

One reason why Piper is comfortable associating with men such as Mark Driscoll and Rick Warren is that he shares to some degree their belief in “cultural liberalism”. He believes in the freedom to dabble in the pop culture and seems to warn more against “judgmentalism” and “legalism” than against worldliness. His church is a rock & roll center. This loose principle is enticing to world lovers. As far as we know he doesn’t reprove Warren for his summer dance parties and nine rock & roll worship venues (including country line dancing and Island hulu) and for singing Jimi Hendrick’s drug-drenched song “Purple Haze” at a church function, and he doesn’t reprove Driscoll for his New Years Eve champagne dance parties and dance competitions.

### **A soft, more tolerant philosophy**

Another thing that doubtless attracts some fundamentalists and Independent Baptists to Piper is his soft, more tolerant stance overall. This is reflected in the wide variety of people he approvingly quotes. It is reflected in his associations, in his way of Christian living. Even his warnings are typically framed in a gentle manner. He is definitely *not* a separatist. His warnings about the dangerous of the world are issued in generalities rather than specifics; they are issued more as suggestions than commandments.

The hour calls for a heavy emphasis on separation, both ecclesiastical and separation from the world, but John Piper is extremely quiet on both fronts.

### **THE ULTIMATE DANGER OF JOHN PIPER**

Because of his careless associations, John Piper can lead you anywhere. He can lead you to Rick Warren and Mark Driscoll, and from there you can go in any direction in the treacherous waters of modern evangelicalism. You can encounter Roman Catholic contemplative mysticism, New Ager philosophy such as Leonard Sweet's New Light, goddess worship as promoted in *The Shack*, the downgrade of hell, the downgrade of biblical inspiration, the denial of the substitutionary blood atonement of Christ, a kingdom-now gospel, theistic evolution, self-esteemism, and many other things.

John Piper and his renunciation of "separatism" is a bridge to these treacherous waters.

We have documented this great danger in the report "The Path from Independent Baptist to The Shack, Rome, and Beyond", which is available at the Way of Life web site.

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