

Salvation and the Glory of God

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Within the Bible-believing community today, there are two differing views about salvation:

1. **The New Calvinism Position:** Salvation is ongoing, developing, and inseparably connected to obedience. You are justified by faith alone, but you cannot go to heaven by faith alone.

Salvation = Sanctification

2. **The Free Grace Position:** Salvation is crossing a line from being lost to being saved. You can only go to heaven by faith alone.

Salvation => Sanctification

I will here only focus on what **we** do to be eternally saved. For example, I will not be discussing the role of the sovereignty of God or the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation.

My Thesis

I will be establishing the “Free Grace Position” as being the most consistent with the glory of God. I shall deal with it in three areas: 1. Justification, 2. Holiness, and 3. Repentance.

A General Comment on the New Calvinists

New Calvinism is a movement, not an organization. The most predominant New Calvinist organization is called “The Gospel Coalition.” New Calvinism is not my label, it is the identification generally given to Calvinists, of both the covenant and dispensational camps, that hold the position as defined above. I shall here confine my review to the soteriology of John Piper and John MacArthur, the two most influential men at the center of this movement. My criticism in this paper is only about their views on salvation. I do not in any way intend to demean their character or their teaching on other subjects.

1. Justification

John Piper on Justification

In the Foreword to Thomas Schreiner’s book “Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification,” John Piper wrote:

...right with God by faith alone, not attain heaven by faith alone. There are other conditions for attaining heaven [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015, the italics is Piper quoting Schreiner].

On September 25, 2017, John Piper wrote an article entitled *Does God Really Save Us by Faith Alone?* He writes,

In final salvation at the last judgment, faith is confirmed by the sanctifying fruit it has borne, and we are saved through that fruit and that faith... These works of faith, and this obedience of faith, these fruits of the Spirit that come by faith, are necessary for our final salvation. No holiness, no heaven (Hebrews 12:14). So, we should not speak of getting to heaven by faith alone in the same way we are justified by faith alone [John Piper, “Does God Really Save Us by Faith Alone?” September 25, 2017 (www.desireingod.org) underline mine].

John MacArthur on Justification

Real salvation is not merely justification. It cannot be isolated from regeneration, sanctification, and ultimately glorification. It is a process as much as it is an event, a process through which we are being conformed to the image of his Son [<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/80-39/jesus-teaching-on-salvation>, underline mine].

In his study Bible, MacArthur comments on a phrase in Hebrews 12:1, *let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us*. MacArthur writes, “The reference is to those Hebrews who had made

a profession of Christ, but had not gone all the way to full faith. They had not yet begun the race, which starts with salvation” [“The MacArthur Study Bible,” p. 1919, underline mine].

The Free Grace Position

Notice, both Piper and MacArthur invent new terms for salvation, “**final** salvation” or “**real** salvation,” which only come about by “**full** faith.” They believe justification (to declare right), which indeed comes by faith alone, won’t get you to heaven. They claim final/real salvation is a “process” of “obedience” of “yielding to his lordship.” MacArthur says “full faith” comes only as we *lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us*. Or as Piper put it, “no holiness, no heaven.”

Shawn Lazar, in a June 13, 2017, blog, gave this excellent illustration of the New Calvinist position:

Piper is saying, “Becoming a member of the gym is absolutely free. But if you’re really a member, you’ll necessarily pay \$50/month. And if you aren’t paying \$50/month, then you aren’t really a member. But don’t misunderstand me—the gym is free! It doesn’t cost anything to join! So, how will you be paying, Visa or MasterCard?” According to Piper’s gospel, you gotta’ pay to join the ‘free’ gym. By contrast, and still using the gym analogy, the Free Grace position is simple: “Becoming a member of the gym is absolutely free. Period. Save your money to help out your neighbors.”

Piper’s “final salvation,” which is the same as MacArthur’s “real salvation,” is nowhere to be found in the Bible. They have had to invent these terms to accommodate their New Calvinism. In the Bible, there is just *salvation*, and it is obtained by *grace* through *faith*. The Bible gives no “other conditions for attaining heaven.” In 1 Corinthians 3, we are told that *no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ* (v. 11). Then we hear of a man whose works are all burned up in judgment, yet we are told, *If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved* (v. 15). It would seem that his salvation is based on his foundation in Christ, which includes no good works.

From the Reformation through the Great Awakening, missionary organizations, campus groups, and the big-meeting evangelists like Billy Graham, the message is that a sinner can come to God,



“Just as I am, without one plea, but that Thy blood was shed for me.”

Salvation is not a “process through which we are being conformed to the image of his Son.” Of course, God conforms believers to the image of His Son. But that is not how we attain salvation. “Works of faith,” “obedience of faith,” “yielding to his lordship,” “the pursuit of holiness,” or a “decision to forsake all unrighteousness,” will not save anybody. Here is what saves:

- **Ephesians 2:8** *For by grace you have been saved through faith.*
- **Romans 3:22** *The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe.*
- **Romans 4:5** *To the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.*
- **John 1:12** *But as many as received Him to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.*
- **John 3:16** *Whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*
- **John 5:24** *He who hears my word, and believes Him who sent me, has eternal life.*
- **John 6:29** *Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.*
- **Romans 3:28** *For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.*
- **Romans 5:9** *Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.*
- **Romans 6:23** *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

- **Romans 10:9** ... *for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness.*
- **Romans 11:6** *But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace.*

New Calvinism Salvation Parallels Roman Catholic Salvation

MacArthur claims his position is an old one. True. It is as old as Catholicism. To link salvation to sanctification is to parallel the Roman Catholic view where salvation is sanctification. In response to MacArthur's position on lordship salvation, Zane Hodges wrote a book called "Absolutely Free!" He stated in his introduction:

Lordship teaching reserves to itself the right to strip professing Christians of their claims to faith and to consign such people to the ranks of the lost. ... the marvelous truth of justification by faith, apart from works, recedes into shadows not unlike those which darkened the days before the Reformation. What replaces this doctrine is a kind of faith/works synthesis which differs only insignificantly from official Roman Catholic dogma (1989, pp. 19-20).

Tim Shaughnessy and Timothy F. Kauffman wrote,

In every generation there arise men from within the church who stumble into the Roman Catholic view of justification, and having stumbled, then attempt to import that Roman Catholic error into the Church of God so that the children of God might stumble with them. John Piper is just the latest in a long line of such men, and he will not be the last [<http://biblethumpingwingnut.com/2017/10/10/gospel-according-piper>].

2. Holiness

John Piper on Killing Sin

Essential to the Christian life and necessary for final salvation is the killing of sin (Romans 8:13) and the pursuit of holiness (Hebrews 12:14). Mortification of sin, sanctification in holiness. But what makes that possible and pleasing to God? We put sin to death and we pursue holiness from a justified position... [same post, September 25, 2017 (www.desireingod.org)].

John MacArthur Clarifies

"True faith is manifest only in obedience" ["The Gospel According to Jesus," 1988, Pt.18].

The Free Grace Position

"Final salvation is the killing of sin." Really??? I thought that's what Jesus did on the cross. Understand, New Calvinism limits the sufficiency of Christ's death on the cross. The "killing of sin" which "leads to salvation" is accomplished by Christ on the cross, not by our "wholehearted devotion." If we have to do something to attain "mortification of sin, sanctification in holiness," then the death of Jesus on the cross is insufficient to pay for our sin. In that case, it is not true that:

- **2 Corinthians 5:21** *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*
- **Titus 3:5-7** *He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the **washing of regeneration** and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that **being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.***

3. Repentance

John MacArthur on Repentance

Here is what John MacArthur says about repentance:

The idea that genuine repentance could result in anything but a change of life, is completely foreign to Scripture. What does the Bible teach about the relationship between salvation and repentance? First, it teaches that repentance is essential to salvation. One cannot truly believe unless he repents, and one cannot truly repent unless he believes... Second, the Greek word for repentance (*metanoia*) means “to have another mind,” but it cannot properly be defined to exclude a sense of hatred of and penitence for sin. The biblical concept of repentance involves far more than merely a casual change of thinking. Biblically, a person who repents does not continue willfully in sin. Repentance is a turning from sin, and it always results in changed behavior (Luke 3:8)... It is not “faith plus repentance” that saves, but rather a repentant faith [<https://www.gty.org/library/.../what-is-repentance-and-how-does-it-relate-to-salvation>, underline mine].

The Free Grace Position

Hmm... one wonders what possible difference there could be between “faith plus repentance” and “a repentant faith.” Both seem to be a faith that includes repentance. MacArthur says, “The idea that genuine repentance could result in anything but a change of life, is completely foreign to Scripture.” Well, the Corinthians were dividing up the church into groups following different leaders, allowing adultery to go unchecked, and letting people get drunk at the Lord’s Supper. But, before Paul reprimanded them for all that, he called them *those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours* (1 Corinthians 1:2). It sounds like they were just as saved as all other believers, without much of that “change of life” MacArthur is talking about.

Again, we see how these men add qualifying words to Biblical concepts. Whereas the Bible has salvation, repentance, and faith, Piper has “**final** salvation,” MacArthur has “**real** salvation” through “**full** faith” and now, “**genuine** repentance.” But MacArthur never deals with the New Testament concept of repentance.

The New Testament word translated repentance is *μετάνοια* (*metanoia*). The meaning of the word is simple, clear, and obvious. It only means to *change your mind* or *change your understanding*.

- Meta (μετα) = *change*, as in the metamorphosis of a butterfly
- Noeo (νοεω) = the Greek word for *mind* or *understanding*

It means to turn around in your understanding of something. It’s not “merely a casual change of thinking.” It means to leave one way of thinking and turn to another way. It’s a mental about-face. It means I am here, so I’m no longer there. I came here from there. This has been the main cause of Christian persecution all through the centuries. Faith in Jesus Christ cannot just be added to whatever else you believe. You cannot just add Jesus to your other gods. Christianity is a change of mind away from idolatry, pantheism, atheism, or whatever you believed or didn’t believe, to receiving Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. It’s to *turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God* (Acts 26:18). That’s *μετάνοια* (*metanoia*).

But not so with the English word “repentance.” The “New Oxford American Dictionary” defines the word “repent,” to “express sincere regret or remorse about one’s wrongdoing or sin.” That’s not *μετάνοια* (*metanoia*). MacArthur admits the word means “to have another mind.” But then he ignores that completely and goes back to using the English “regret or remorse” definition of the word “repentance,” calling it “hatred of and penitence for sin.”

Actually, Greek has a word for “regret” or “remorse,” used in the sense of “hatred of and penitence for sin.” It’s μεταμέλομαι (*metamelomai*), and it means “to feel regret as the result of what one has done” (“Louw and Nida Lexicon”).

- **Matthew 27:3** *Then when Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he **felt remorse** (KJV **repented himself**) [μεταμέλομαι (*metamelomai*)], and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders.*

We must now notice the obvious. The Biblical μετάνοια (*metanoia*), which is, unfortunately, almost always translated as some form of *repentance*, does not mean anything close to the English definition of “repentance.” When Peter reported to the elders about the conversion of Cornelius and his friends in Caesarea, they said,

- **Acts 11:18** *Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the **repentance** [μετάνοια (*metanoia*)] that leads to life.*

There was no regret or remorse in this *repentance*. Actually, the report about Cornelius before his *repentance that leads to life*, stated he was a devout man and one who feared God with all his household and gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually (Acts 10:2). There is simply no mention at all of any regret or remorse for wrongdoing in his μετάνοια (*metanoia*) repentance.

But didn’t Paul talk about feelings of regret and remorse? Yes, he did. It’s connected to things like being filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:19), examining yourself (2 Corinthians 13:5), not grieving the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30), and confessing your sins (1 John 1:8-10). But it is not embodied in, or tied to, the word μετάνοια (*metanoia*), which only means a change of mind.

Therefore, if you want to continue to use the word *repentance* for μετάνοια (*metanoia*), as it is translated almost everywhere in the New Testament, then you need to ignore the dictionary definition of repentance and replace it with “to change one’s mind or understanding.”

Ryrie gives an excellent perspective.

Is repentance a condition for receiving eternal life? Yes, if it is repentance or changing one’s mind about Jesus Christ. No, if it means to be sorry for sin or even to resolve to turn from sin, for those things *will not save* [Charles C. Ryrie, “So Great a Salvation,” Victor Books, July 1, 1989, pp. 92-99, italics emphasis his].

People are often sorry and resolve to turn from sin, for example, in things like AA and drug rehab groups. But it does not get anybody saved. Nobody can be saved by remorse, regret, or a resolve to turn from sin.

Coming to Faith Is Changing Your Mind

When I make the initial decision to believe something that I did not believe before, that necessarily involves a change of mind. That change of mind is exactly how Paul called people to believing in Jesus Christ, in every synagogue, home, market place or prison cell he was in. For example, when unbelieving Jews came to him in Rome,

Acts 28:23-24 *...he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe.*

Notice that Paul’s message was not one of regret and remorse over sin, a resolve to turn from sin, to make Christ Lord any other works. His appeal was for a mental change about Jesus fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. *Being persuaded* is synonymous with belief, and not *being persuaded* is synonymous with those who *would not believe*.

Faith and repentance are interchangeable, not two requirements for salvation. Faith is often given as a requirement for salvation with no mention of repentance. John's gospel is a mega example. It's the gospel that has the stated purpose of bringing us to eternal life.

- **John 20:31** *but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*

Although the gospel of John repeatedly talks about eternal salvation, it never once mentions the word *μετάνοια* (*metanoia*) repentance. Neither does it mention remorse or regret or making Christ Lord, a resolve to turn from sin, or any other works as a requirement for salvation.

Looking at It Logically

Except in quantum physics (and this is not quantum physics), never does the effect of anything produce its cause, nor is it part of the cause. A bird causes a bird nest. But the nest does not cause the bird, nor is it part of the bird. God caused creation. Creation did not cause God nor is creation part of God. Understand (by observation):

1. Every effect [like a bird nest] has a cause [a bird].
2. The cause [a bird] is always greater than the effect [a bird nest].
3. The effect [a bird nest] always follows the cause [the bird].
4. The effect [a bird nest] is distinct from, never part of, the cause [the bird].

So,

1. The effect [the changed life of a believer] has a cause [faith in Christ].
2. The cause [faith in Christ] is greater than the effect [the changed life].
3. The effect [the changed life] always follows the cause [faith in Christ].
4. The effect [the changed life] is distinct from, never part of, the cause [faith in Christ].

So the idea of a lordship salvation, or a faith + works gospel, or the on-going "preaching the gospel to ourselves" salvation of the New Calvinists is irrational, since it sees the effect and the cause as the same thing, and that's never ever true about anything, anywhere.

Which Concept of Salvation Best Incorporates the Glory of God?

The gospel of salvation brings the glory of God to a lost world.

- **2 Corinthians 4:4 & 6** *For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

Sin keeps us from the glory of God.

- **Romans 3:23** *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

When we are saved, we receive the glory of God

- **Ephesians 1:6** *... the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.*

Those who receive the glory of God at salvation, also receive a glorified body in heaven.

- **1 Corinthians 15:43** *it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory.*
- **Philippians 3:21** *[Christ] will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory.*

Think of every sin you commit as a brick that makes a wall between you and God. What the New Calvinists suggest for salvation ("regret," "remorse," "penance," "obedience," "changed behavior," or "lordship") will not remove any bricks from the wall. At best, they help you add bricks to the wall more slowly, but they don't get rid of any bricks in the wall, and the wall is still growing. Only faith in Christ removes the wall, so that you enter His glory.