

THE REASONS FOR EVANGELISTIC PRAYER-Part 2

Consistent with God's Desire

No true biblical theology can teach that God takes pleasure in the damnation of the wicked. Yet though it does not please Him, God will receive glory even in the damnation of unbelievers (cf. [Romans 9:22–23](#)). How His electing grace and predestined purpose can stand beside His love for the world and desire that the Gospel be preached to all people, still holding them responsible for their own rejection and condemnation, is a divine mystery. The Scriptures teach God's love for the world, His displeasure in judging sinners, His desire for all to hear the Gospel and be saved. They also teach that every sinner is incapable yet responsible to believe and will be damned if he does not.

Crowning the Scripture's teaching on this matter is the great truth that God has elected all believers and loved them before the world began. **“To come to the knowledge of the truth” speaks of salvation.** *Epignōsis* (“knowledge”) is used four times in the Pastoral Epistles ([2 Timothy 2:25](#); [2 Timothy 3:7](#); [Titus 1:1](#)), and in each occurrence it refers to the true knowledge that brings about salvation. Far from desiring their damnation, God desires the lost to come to a saving knowledge of the truth.

Some have argued that [1 Timothy 2:3–7](#) teaches universalism. If God desires the salvation of all men, they argue, then all will be saved, or God won't get what He wants. Others agree that what God wills comes to pass, because **“all men”** refers to all classes of men, not every individual. Neither of those positions is necessary, however. We must distinguish between God's will of decree (His eternal purpose), and His will expressed as desire. **“Desire”** is not from *boulomai*, which would be more likely to express God's will of decree, but from *thelō*, which Paul uses in [1 Timothy 2](#) and can refer to God's will of desire. This is precisely the distinction theologians often make between God's secret will and His revealed will.

God desires many things that He does not decree. It was never God's *desire* that sin exist, yet the undeniable existence of sin proves that even it fulfills His eternal purposes ([Isaiah 46:10](#))—though in no sense is He the author of sin ([James 1:13](#)).

Jesus lamented over Jerusalem, **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling”** ([Matthew 23:37](#)). John Murray and Ned B. Stonehouse wrote, “We have found that God Himself expresses an ardent desire for the fulfillment of certain things which He has not decreed in His inscrutable counsel to come to pass” (*The Free Offer of the Gospel* [Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979], 26). God desires all men to be saved. It is their willful rejection of Him that sends them to hell. The biblical truths of election and predestination do not cancel man's moral responsibility.