

## Audio Transcript:

### John Piper: Does God Delight in Destroying Sinners?

*An email from podcast listener Luke, who writes in to ask, “Pastor John, how do we reconcile [Ezekiel 18:32](#) [‘For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord GOD’] with [Deuteronomy 28:63](#) [‘And as the LORD took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the LORD will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you’]. How do you handle this apparent contradiction in Scripture?”*

When I meet passages like this in the Bible, especially passages relating to the emotions of God, I am very slow to think that God cannot have these seemingly contradictory emotions — one expressed in [Ezekiel 18:32](#) and the other expressed in [Deuteronomy 28:63](#). Instead, my assumption is that there is a true way that God takes pleasure in the just destruction of the wicked. And there is a true sense in which he does not delight in the death of anyone. In other words, both are true. And our job is to discern, as much as we can, in what different ways or senses they may be true.

It may be, since this is such a huge issue, I should point to a couple of places where I have written about it. In *Desiring God*, pages 38 to 40 and *The Pleasures of God*, pages 55 to 59 I tackle precisely those two texts that were mentioned. It is as if they were reading what I wrote and wanted some clarity on it. So that is where I have written about it if you want to pull down the book off the shelf or get it somewhere and look at it.

But let me try to give a brief answer here and not depend on people going there.

God’s emotional life must be infinitely complex. In a moment of time, the Lord hears prayers from 10 million Christians around the

world, and he sympathizes with each one personally and individually as a caring Father as [Hebrews 4:15](#) say he does — even though among these 10 million prayers some are brokenhearted and some are bursting with joy.

How can God weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice when they are both coming to him at the same time? In fact, they are always coming to him with no break at all, day in and day out, century after century. This is unfathomable for us how God in his infinite complexity of emotions can relate intimately, personally, in a present, wonderful way to the brokenhearted and not be a spoilsport at somebody's wedding at the same time while he is delighting in the joy that they are having.

So maybe this will help. It helped me, anyway. The most relevant analogy I could think of was whether or not God delighted in the death of Jesus. Now clearly God chose that his Son would be killed.

[Isaiah 53:10](#) says, “It was the will of the Lord to crush him [or bruise him]. He has put him to grief.” What is not clear is that the Hebrew word *will* (רָצָה) is translated most often with “delight” or “take pleasure” or “enjoy” or “be glad” or “be the good pleasure of.” In other words, nobody twisted God's arm to send his Son to die. The death of the Son of God in one sense *pleased* God — it was a good and right and hard thing to do. In fact, [Ephesians 5:2](#) says that Christ gave himself, “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” And you want to stop and say: Fragrant offering? Like to whom was it such a good smell? And the answer is: God.

And yet [Romans 8:32](#) says, “God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.” Now that word “did not spare” (ἐφείσατο) is intended to communicate to us that this was not easy. This was his only Son. This was his much-loved Son. This was emotionally difficult in one sense for God to do. He loved his Son. He did not relish the thought of the pain that would come to his Son, or the

darkness that would spread over his Son. And yet in another sense, he did.

Another analogy that has helped me with that text and the other passages from [Ezekiel 18:32](#) and [Deuteronomy 28:63](#) is to suggest that God's infinite complexity is such that he can look at the world through two lenses. He can look through a narrow lens or a wide-angle lens. And when God looks at a painful or wicked event through a narrow lens, he sees the tragedy of sin for what it is in itself, and he is angered or he is grieved at what he sees. "I have no pleasure in the death of anyone" ([Ezekiel 18:32](#)) — when God looks at a painful or a wicked event through his narrow lens.

But when he looks through his wide-angle lens, he sees the tragedy of sin in relation to everything leading up to it and everything flowing from it. He sees it in relation to all the connections and all the effects that form a pattern or a mosaic, stretching into eternity. And that mosaic and all of its parts, good and evil, bring him delight. [Psalm 135:6](#), "Whatever the LORD pleases he does." He is pleased by all that he does and all that he permits in the world. He has his reasons for doing it in the wide-angle lens of things.

So that is my effort to stay faithful to the Scriptures and come to terms with the infinitely complex emotional life of God. Through one lens, he does not delight in the death of anyone, and through another lens, as he sees it as part of the whole, he does.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/does-god-delight-in-destroying-sinners>