



## Book Review

John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World*  
(Crossway, 2006)

John Piper's *What Jesus Demands from the World* is a book that can be best described as a serious examination of the commands spoken by Jesus throughout the four Gospels. Piper, a well-known Baptist minister and theologian, took five months ministerial leave to reflect and write on the meaning and motivation of Jesus' commands and their connection to his person and work. Piper does not apologise for the confronting title of the book. Nor does he try to soften the challenging commands that Jesus requests of any true disciple.

His purpose is to examine carefully the meaning of these commands and explain their significance to a believer's life and faith. From this stance, the book is a solemn reminder of the challenges a believer signs up for when deciding to follow Christ.

The book can easily be used as a study guide as the 50 chapters cover a comprehensive list of Christ's commands and their interpretations. Some of these include: the requirement to trust completely (as opposed to being anxious); the necessity of practising forgiveness; the importance of striving to enter through the narrow door; the command to love and pray for our enemies and our need for supreme allegiance to Jesus. These commands, amongst others, are enlarged upon over several chapters where Piper extrapolates their contextual meaning and significance.

Whilst I find the number of commands dealt with in this book quite rigorous, Piper's insight into attitudes which Jesus commands us to display is thought provoking and there are hidden gems found throughout the book. For example, he considers the attitude of joy. Christians can leap for joy when they experience hate and reviling on account of Jesus's name – in fact we are commanded to rejoice on that day, realising that our reward is great (Luke 6:23). Piper explains that the joy here is not superficial but is a type of attitude that lives with suffering and which eventually will outlast that suffering. Joy, he explains, is sustained through fellowship with Jesus and has a continual mindset which glorifies God.

The author devotes several chapters to commands which a disciple may find difficult: loving and praying for our enemies; doing good to those who hate you; praying with perseverance; and not being anxious about the threats of man. His insights and reflections shed light on these commands, offering the reader many opportunities for self-examination. A sampling of his reflections:

- On loving our enemy: 'But a heart that does not aim at our enemy's eternal joy in Jesus is not the full-orbed, robust love that Jesus demands.' (p 227)
- On praying persistently: 'The point is not to finally break God's resistance but to discover, by patient prayer, God's wisdom as to the way and time the prayer should be answered.' (p 108)

It is encouraging to note that Piper approaches baptism and the remembrance of the Lord through the Supper as they are simply stated in the four Gospels, reinforcing the fact that they are Christ's commands. However, in my opinion, the fullness of their doctrinal importance is lacking from his treatment of these two commands. Also, his beliefs on marriage and divorce may be controversial and his reasoning for what some might describe as a rigid approach appears to be related to his understanding of the contextual meaning of Matthew 5:32, 19:9. Despite this, I was impressed by Piper's presentation on the sacredness of the marriage bond and its glorious spiritual portrayal of God's covenant with his people.

I think this book is best read in a devotional style - slowly pondering the spiritual commands which Jesus encourages us to pursue. Most of all, Piper's book helped me appreciate some of the lofty traits of Jesus: his utmost loyalty to the Father, his unconquerable joy and goodwill, his indifference to public scrutiny and his meekness and lowliness of heart. Piper succeeds in meeting his aim as he explains Jesus, his work and how it reveals the glory of God. I would recommend this book to anyone wanting to contemplate Jesus and his glorious nature. ■

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