



What
JESUS
DEMANDS
from the
WORLD

*“All authority
in heaven and on
earth has been given to me”*

JESUS

JOHN PIPER

What Jesus Demands from the World

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has been given to me.*

J E S U S

INTRODUCTION: THE AIM OF THE BOOK

The aim of this book is God-glorifying obedience to Jesus. To that end I am seeking to obey Jesus' last command: "Make disciples of all nations . . . *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you*" (Matt. 28:19-20). Jesus' final command was to teach all his commandments.

THE IMPOSSIBLE FINAL COMMAND

Actually, the final command was more precise than that. He did *not* say, "Teach them all my commandments." He said, "Teach them to *observe* all my commandments." You can teach a parrot all of Jesus' commandments. But you cannot teach a parrot to *observe* them. Parrots will not repent, and worship Jesus, and lay up treasures in heaven, and love their enemies, and go out like sheep in the midst of wolves to herald the kingdom of God.

Teaching people to parrot all that Jesus commanded is easy. Teaching them to *observe* all that Jesus commanded is *impossible*. Jesus used that word. When a rich man could not bring himself to let go of his riches and follow him, Jesus said, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. . . . With man it is *impossible*, but not with God. For all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:25-27).

Therefore, the person who sets himself to obey Jesus' final commission—for example, to teach a rich man to *observe* the command to "renounce all that he has" (Luke 14:33)—attempts the impos-

sible. But Jesus said it was *not* impossible. “All things are possible with God.” So the greatest challenge in writing this book has been to discern God’s way of making impossible obedience possible.

Jesus said that this impossible goal happens through *teaching*. “Make disciples . . . *teaching* them to observe all that I have commanded you.” There is, of course, more to it than that—like the atoning death of Jesus (Mark 10:45) and the work of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26) and prayer (Matt. 6:13). But in the end Jesus focused on teaching. I take this to mean that God has chosen to do the impossible through the teaching of all that Jesus commanded. That’s what I pray this book will prove to be—a kind of teaching that God will use to bring about impossible obedience to Jesus. And all of that for the glory of God.

TEACHING AND OBEDIENCE THAT GLORIFY GOD

The reason I emphasize the glory of God is because Jesus did. He said, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and *give glory to your Father who is in heaven*” (Matt. 5:16). The ultimate goal of Jesus’ commandments is not that we observe them by doing good works. The *ultimate* goal is that God be glorified. The obedience of good works is penultimate. But what is ultimate is that in our obedient lives God be displayed as the most beautiful reality in the world. That is Jesus’ ultimate goal¹ and mine.

This helps me answer the question: What kind of teaching of Jesus’ commandments might God be willing to use to bring about such impossible obedience? If the aim of obedience is ultimately the glory of God, then it is probable that the teaching God will use is the kind that keeps his glory at the center. Therefore, my aim has been to keep the supremely valuable beauty of God in proper focus throughout the book.

¹ See especially *Demand* #47.

KEEPING THE COMMANDMENTS CONNECTED TO JESUS AND HIS WORK

How then do we keep the beauty of God in proper focus in relation to Jesus' commandments? By treating the meaning and motivation of the commands in connection with the person and work of Jesus. The person and work of Jesus are the primary means by which God has glorified himself in the world. No revelation of God's glory is greater. Jesus said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Therefore, his *person* is the manifestation of the glory of God. To see him as he really is means seeing the infinitely valuable beauty of God. Jesus also said, as he was praying, "I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do" (John 17:4). Therefore, his *work* is a manifestation of the glory of God. When we see what he achieved and how he did it, we see the majesty and greatness of God.

Therefore, my aim has been to *probe the meaning and the motivation of Jesus' commands in connection with his person and work*. What emerges again and again is that what he is commanding is a life that displays the worth of his person and the effect of his work. His intention is that we not disconnect what he commands from who he is and what he has done.

We should not be surprised, then, that Jesus' final, climactic command is that we teach all nations to observe all that he commanded. This leads to his ultimate purpose. When obedience to his commands happens, what the world sees is the fruit of Jesus' glorious work and the worth of his glorious person. In other words, they see the glory of God. This is why Jesus came and why his mission remains until he comes.

A SKETCH OF THE PERSON AND WORK OF JESUS

Anticipating what we will see later in the book, the briefest sketch of Jesus' person and work should be given here, so that from the start the commands rest on their proper foundation. Jesus came into the world, sent by God, as the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. When Jesus

asked his disciples who they thought he was, Peter answered, “You are the Christ [that is, Messiah], the Son of the living God.” To this Jesus responded, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 16:16-17).

When Jesus was on trial for his life, the charge was blasphemy, and eventually treason against Caesar, because of his apparent claims to be the Messiah, the King of Israel, the Son of God. The Jewish high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” And Jesus said, “I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:61-62).

WHY JESUS FAVORED THE TITLE *SON OF MAN*

Even though Jesus acknowledged that he was the Messiah, the Son of God, his favorite designation for himself was “Son of Man.” At one level this title carries the obvious meaning that Jesus was truly human. But because of its use by the prophet Daniel, it probably is a very exalted claim of universal authority.

Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. (Dan. 7:13-14)

The reason Jesus favored the title *Son of Man* for himself was that the terms *Messiah* and *Son of God* were loaded with popular political pretensions. They would give the wrong impression about the nature of his messiahship. They could easily imply that he fit in with the conceptions of the day that the Messiah would conquer Rome and liberate Israel and set up his earthly kingdom. But Jesus had to navigate these political waters by presenting himself as truly the Messiah, even the divine Son of God with universal authority, but

also reject the popular notion that the Messiah would not suffer but immediately rule.

The term *Son of Man* proved most useful in this regard because though it did carry exalted claims for those who had ears to hear, on the face of it he was not making explicit claims to political power. Under this favorite title (while not rejecting the others), Jesus was able to make his claims that the long-awaited messianic kingdom of God had come in his ministry.²

THE KINGDOM OF GOD HAD COME INTO HISTORY

The Jewish people longed for the day when the Messiah would come and bring the kingdom of God. The kingdom would mean that the enemies of Israel are defeated, sins are wiped away, diseases are healed, the dead are raised, and righteousness, joy, and peace hold sway on the earth with the Messiah on the throne. Jesus arrived and said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). What he meant was that in his own ministry the liberating, saving reign of God had arrived. “If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then *the kingdom of God has come upon you . . . the kingdom of God is in the midst of you*” (Luke 11:20; 17:21).

But there was a mystery. Jesus called it “the secret of the kingdom of God” (Mark 4:11). The mystery was that the kingdom of God had come in history *before* its final, triumphant manifestation. Fulfillment was here, but consummation was not here.³ The kingdom would arrive in two stages. In the first stage the Messiah would come and suffer, and in the second stage the Messiah would come in glory (Luke 24:46; Mark 14:62).

²For a helpful overview of the titles of Jesus in the Gospels in the space of twelve pages see Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 401-412.

³For an excellent book-length treatment of the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus see George Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974).

HE CAME TO SERVE AND DIE FOR SINS AND RISE AGAIN

Therefore, the primary work of Jesus on the earth during his first coming was to suffer and die for the forgiveness of sins. He said, “Even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). And at the Last Supper with his disciples, he took the cup and said, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:28).

Dying was not his only mission. But it was central. In shedding his blood he purchased the new-covenant promises. The new covenant was God’s promise that all who enter the coming kingdom will have their sins forgiven, will have the law written on their hearts, and will know God personally (Jer. 31:31-34). The blessings of this covenant are crucial in enabling us to obey Jesus’ commandments. Which makes Jesus’ death of supreme importance in bringing about the impossible obedience that he demands.

But there was more to his mission. When John the Baptist was perplexed about whether Jesus was really the Messiah, he sent word to him from prison: “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?” Jesus answered, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is the one who is not offended by me” (Matt. 11:3-6). In other words, “All my healing and preaching are a demonstration of my messiahship, but don’t take offense that I am not fulfilling the political expectation of earthly rule. I *am* the one who is to come, but my central mission (in this first coming) is suffering—to give my life as a ransom for many.”

When his mission was accomplished, after three days in the grave, Jesus rose from the dead. This was God’s plan. It was an act of supreme authority over death. “No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father” (John 10:18). When he was raised, he appeared to his disciples on many occasions and gave them proof that he was

physically alive (Luke 24:39-43). He opened the Scriptures to them so they could see more fully how he fulfilled God's promises (Luke 24:32, 45). Then he commissioned them to be his witnesses, instructed them to wait for the promised Holy Spirit, and ascended into heaven (Luke 24:46-51).

OBEDIENCE IS THE FRUIT OF HIS WORK AND THE DISPLAY OF HIS GLORY

On the basis of who he was and what he accomplished, Jesus made his demands. The demands cannot be separated from his person and work. The obedience he demands is the fruit of his *redeeming work* and the display of his *personal glory*. That is why he came—to create a people who glorify his gracious reign by bearing the fruit of his kingdom (Matt. 21:43).

When he said, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10), he was speaking about Zacchaeus who had just been so transformed that he gave half his possessions to the poor (Luke 19:8). In other words, the Son of Man came to save people from their suicidal love affair with possessions (and every other idol) and to lead them into a kind of impossible obedience that displays the infinite worth of Jesus. Therefore, my effort in this book has been to hold together the meaning and motivation of Jesus' commands, the greatness of his work, and the glory of his person.

A WORD ABOUT METHOD

I will give more detail about methodology in the following “A Word to Biblical Scholars” (which I invite everyone to read!), but it seems good to include at this point some crucial guiding choices that I have made. My method is to reflect on the meaning and motivation of Jesus' demands *as they appear in the New Testament Gospels* in the context of his person and work. I do not cite the rest of the New Testament for my understanding of Jesus in the Gospels. Citing the whole New Testament is a perfectly legitimate thing to do, and in my preaching I do not hesitate to bring Scriptures from anywhere

to help make any text plain, provided I don't change the meaning of either text. But in this book I have given my rendering of Jesus almost entirely through the lens of his own words as recorded in the Gospels. One of my subordinate aims in this approach is to encourage confidence in the unity of the New Testament, because the upshot of this portrayal is so compatible with what the other New Testament writers taught.

WHY THIS TITLE FOR THE BOOK?

A few words about the title *What Jesus Demands from the World*. I am aware that the word *demands* is jarring to many modern ears. It feels harsh, severe, strict, stark, austere, abrasive. The reason I choose that word is to confront some of the underlying causes for why it would feel offensive to portray Jesus as demanding. My conviction is that if we rightly understand Jesus' demands, and if we are willing to find in him our supreme joy, his demands will not feel severe but sweet. They would land on us the way the Lady's commands landed on the beasts in C. S. Lewis's novel *Perelandra*: "The beasts would not think it hard if I told them to walk on their heads. It would become their delight to walk on their heads. I am His beast, and all His biddings are joys."⁴

But it would be a cheap and superficial spin to give the impression that Jesus does not in fact often speak abrasively and sound severe. This is true not only toward his *adversaries*, the scribes and Pharisees—for example, in Matthew 23, where he calls them children of hell (v. 15), "blind fools" (v. 17), "blind guides" (vv. 16, 24), "hypocrites" (v. 27), "whitewashed tombs" (v. 27), and "brood of vipers" (v. 33). It is also true toward his *disciples*. For example, he says, "If you . . . who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children . . ." (Matt. 7:11); and to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man" (Mark 8:33); and again to

⁴C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 76.

Peter, referring to John's destiny, "What is that to you? You follow me!" (John 21:22).

And after a blunt and jarring teaching in John 6 ("Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life," v. 54), John comments that when "many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?' . . . After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him'" (vv. 60, 66). Such was the price of how he spoke. My aim is not to gloss over the tough implications of the word "demands" or to soften the "hard" sayings of Jesus; the aim is to be changed in our hearts and in our understanding to such a degree that the tough Jesus is as sweet to us as the tender Jesus.

AUTHORITY AND INTIMACY UNDER THE FINAL COMMISSION

That is my goal. You can feel the two come together in what Jesus says on either side of his final command to make disciples. On one side he says, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18). And on the other side he says, "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20). The one says, "I make demands because I have the right. All authority in the universe is mine." The other says, "I make demands because I will help you. I will be with you forever."

I have tried to structure the chapters of the book to draw the reader from shorter chapters and gentler demands toward the more difficult (but no less precious) demands of Jesus.⁵ This is not merely stylistic or tactical. It is theologically fitting. Most of the first nineteen chapters do not demand any external action. They are essentially about what happens in the mind and heart. These come first because the kind of obedience Jesus demands moves from the inside (where the value of Jesus is savored) to the outside (where the value of Jesus is shown).

Of these chapters, the first seven are "You Must Be Born Again,"

⁵For how I chose which commands to include in the book see p. 34-35.

“Repent,” “Come to Me,” “Believe in Me,” “Love Me,” “Listen to Me,” and “Abide in Me.” When these demands are seen for what they really are, they turn the absolute authority of Jesus into a treasure chest of holy joy. When the most glorious person in the universe pays all my debts (Matt. 20:28), and then demands that I come to live with him and enter into his joy (Matt. 25:21), there can be no more desirable demand imaginable. To such a one I say, with Augustine, “Command what you wish, but give what you command.”⁶

DARE HE MAKE DEMANDS OF THE WHOLE WORLD?

The other word in the title that sounds provocative is “world”—*What Jesus Demands from the World*. Two objections arise. One is: *Did* he make demands on the whole world? The other is: *Dare* he make demands on the whole world?

One may ask, did Jesus give all these demands to the world, or did he give them only to his disciples? Is this an ethic for the world or just for the followers of Jesus? The answer is: The demands he gave only to his disciples are also meant for the world because he demands all people everywhere to become his disciples. That is the point of his final command: “Go therefore and make disciples of *all nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). Jesus dares to lay claim to “all nations”—all ethnic groups on the planet.⁷ No exceptions. Jesus is not a tribal deity. All authority in the universe is his, and all creation owes its allegiance to him.

ADVANCING WITH ALL AUTHORITY BUT NO SWORD

He does not send his people to make disciples with a sword. His kingdom does not come by force, but by truth and love and sacrifice and the power of God. “My kingdom is not of this world. If

⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin, 1961), 40 (X, xxix).

⁷ In the final two chapters of this book, I draw out the implications of this verse for the world and explain the meaning of “all nations” more fully.

my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting” (John 18:36). Jesus’ followers do not kill to extend his kingdom. They die. “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). “Some of you they will put to death” (Luke 21:16). Not only will they put the followers of Jesus to death, but they will do it in the name of their religion. “The hour is coming,” Jesus says, “when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God” (John 16:2).

Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, but for now he restrains his power. He does not always use it to prevent his people’s pain, even though he could, and sometimes does. He is with us to the end of the age, but not always to rescue us from harm. He calls us to walk the same road he walked. “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). “If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household” (Matt. 10:25).

The universal authority of Jesus produces a mission of *teaching*, not a mission of terror. His aim is God-glorifying obedience to all that he commanded. The kind of obedience that glorifies God is free and joyful, not constrained and cowering. Even when the cost is supreme, the joy is triumphant, because the cause of Jesus cannot fail. “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven” (Matt. 5:11-12). It is a costly mission, but a joyful one.

My prayer for this book is that it will serve that global mission—to “make disciples of all nations . . . *teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.*” I pray I am a faithful echo of Jesus when he said, “He who sent me is true, and I declare *to the world* what I have heard from him” (John 8:26).

Demand #1

YOU MUST BE
BORN AGAIN

Jesus answered . . . “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’”—JOHN 3:5, 7

Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”—JOHN 3:3

In the third chapter of John’s Gospel, Jesus is speaking to “a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews” (John 3:1). Pharisees were the experts in the Jewish Scriptures. This is why Jesus was astonished that Nicodemus was baffled about what Jesus meant by “You must be born again.” Nicodemus asks, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (John 3:4). Jesus responds, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?” (John 3:10).

A NEW SPIRIT I WILL PUT WITHIN YOU

In other words, an expert in the Jewish Scriptures should not be baffled by Jesus’ demand, “You must be born again.” Why not? Because there are so many clues in the Jewish Scriptures that Jesus and Nicodemus had in common. God had promised a day when he would cause his people to be born again. One of God’s clearest promises is in the book of Ezekiel. Jesus echoed Ezekiel’s words when he said, “Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). Being “born again” is

described as a birth from water and Spirit. Those two terms, “water” and “Spirit,” are linked in Ezekiel 36:25-27. God says:

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

God promises cleansing from sin and the gift of a new human spirit by the presence of his own divine Spirit. Jesus thinks Nicodemus should make the connection between his demand to be born again and Ezekiel’s promise of a new spirit and the gift of God’s Spirit. But he doesn’t. So Jesus explains further by describing the role of God’s Spirit in bringing about this new spirit: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6).

THE DEAD CANNOT SEE

Flesh is what we are by nature. It refers to ordinary humanity. By our first birth we are only flesh. This natural human condition, as we experience it, is spiritually lifeless. We are not born spiritually alive with a heart that loves God. We are born spiritually dead.

That’s what Jesus implied when he said to a would-be disciple who wanted to go home to a funeral, “Leave the *dead* to bury their own dead” (Luke 9:60). In other words, some are physically dead and need burying. Some are spiritually dead and can bury them. He implied it again when, in his parable of the prodigal son, the father says, “This my son was *dead*, and is alive again” (Luke 15:24). That’s why “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). The dead can’t see. That is, they can’t see God’s kingdom as supremely desirable. It looks foolish or mythical or boring. So they “cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). They cannot because it is foolishness to them.

Jesus sees all of humanity divided into two parts: those who are merely born once—“born of the flesh,” “the (spiritually) dead”—and those who are “born again” by the Spirit of God—those who are alive to God and see his kingdom as true and supremely desirable.

THE WIND BLOWS WHERE IT WILL

Nicodemus is not entirely wrong to be baffled. There is a mystery. Jesus says so in John 3:8, “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” In other words, “Nicodemus, you need new spiritual life—a second birth.”

And what Jesus demands from Nicodemus, he demands from all. He is speaking to everyone in the world. No one is excluded. No ethnic group has a greater bent toward life. Dead is dead—whatever our color, ethnicity, culture, or class. We need spiritual eyes. Our first birth will not get us into the kingdom of God. But we do not cause ourselves to be born again. The Spirit does that. And the Spirit is free and blows in ways we do not comprehend. We must be born again. But this is a gift of God.

Look away from yourself. Seek from God what he alone can do for you. Moral improvement of the old you is not what you need. New life is what the whole world needs. It is radical and supernatural. It is outside our control. The dead do not give themselves new life. We must be born again—“not . . . of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13). That is what Jesus demands from the world.

Demand #2

REPENT

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." —MATT. 4:17

I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. —LUKE 5:32

The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. —MATT. 12:41

Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. —LUKE 13:3, 5

The first demand of Jesus' public ministry was, "Repent." He spoke this command indiscriminately to all who would listen. It was a call for radical inward change toward God and man.

WHAT IS REPENTANCE?

Two things show us that repentance is an internal change of mind and heart rather than mere sorrow for sin or mere improvement of behavior. First, the meaning of the Greek word behind the English "repent" (μετανοέω, *metanoēō*) points in this direction. It has two parts: *meta* and *noeō*. The second part (*noeō*) refers to the mind and its thoughts and perceptions and dispositions and purposes. The first part (*meta*) is a prefix that regularly means movement or change.

In view of the way this prefix regularly functions,¹ we may infer that the basic meaning of *repent* is to experience a change of the mind's perceptions and dispositions and purposes.

The other factor that points to this meaning of *repent* is the way Luke 3:8 describes the relationship between repentance and new behavior. It says, "Bear fruits *in keeping with* repentance." Then it gives examples of the fruits: "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise" (Luke 3:11). This means that repenting is what happens inside of us. Then this change leads to the fruits of new behavior. Repentance is not the new deeds, but the inward change that bears the fruit of new deeds. Jesus is demanding that we experience this inward change.

SIN: AN ASSAULT ON GOD

Why? His answer is that we are sinners. "I have not come to call the righteous but *sinner*s to repentance" (Luke 5:32). What was Jesus' view of sin? In the parable of the prodigal son, Jesus describes the son's sin like this: "He squandered his property in reckless living . . . [and] devoured [it] with prostitutes" (Luke 15:13, 30). But when the prodigal repents he says, "Father, I have sinned *against heaven* and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:21). Therefore, throwing your life away on reckless living and prostitutes is not just humanly hurtful; it is an offense against heaven—that is, against God. That's the essential nature of sin. It's an assault on God.

We see this again in the way Jesus taught his disciples to pray. He said that they should pray, "Forgive us our *sins*, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is *indebted* to us" (Luke 11:4). In other words, sins that God forgives are compared to the ones people commit against us, and those are called *debts*. Therefore, Jesus' view of sin is that it dishonors God and puts us in *debt* to restore the divine

¹For example, *meta* is used as a prefix in the words *metabainō* (transfer or change from one place to another), *metaballō* (change one's way of thinking), *metagō* (lead or move from one place to another), *metatithēmi* (convey from one place to another, put in another place, transfer), *metamorphōō* (change in a manner visible to others, be transfigured), *metastrephō* (cause a change in state or condition, change, alter), and *metaschematizō* (change the form of something, transform, change), etc.

honor we had defamed by our God-belittling behavior or attitudes. Later we will see how that debt gets paid by Jesus himself (Mark 10:45). But for us to enjoy that gift he says we must repent.

Repenting means experiencing a change of mind so that we can see God as true and beautiful and worthy of all our praise and all our obedience. This change of mind also embraces Jesus in the same way. We know this because Jesus said, “If God were your Father, you would love *me*, for I came from God” (John 8:42). Seeing God with a new mind includes seeing Jesus with a new mind.

THE UNIVERSAL NEED FOR REPENTANCE

No one is excluded from Jesus’ demand to repent. He made this clear when a group of people came to him with news of two calamities. Innocent people had been killed by Pilate’s massacre and by the fall of the tower of Siloam (Luke 13:1-4). Jesus took the occasion to warn even the bearers of the news: “Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (Luke 13:5). In other words, don’t think calamities mean that some people are sinners in need of repentance and others aren’t. *All* need repentance. Just as all need to be born again (John 3:7), so all must repent because all are sinners.

When Jesus said, “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32), he did not mean that some persons are good enough not to need repentance. He meant some *think* they are (Luke 18:9), and others have already repented and have been set right with God. For example, the rich young ruler desired “to justify himself” (Luke 10:29), while “the tax collector . . . beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ [and he] went down to his house justified [by God!]” (Luke 18:13-14). (For more on Luke 18:9-15, see *Demand #20*.)

THERE IS AN URGENCY TO THIS DEMAND BECAUSE JUDGMENT IS COMING

Therefore, none is excluded. All need repentance. And the need is urgent. Jesus said, “Unless you repent, you will all likewise *perish*.”

What did he mean by *perish*? He meant that the final judgment of God will fall on those who don't repent. "The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here" (Matt. 12:41). Jesus, the Son of God, is warning people of the judgment to come and is offering escape if we will repent. If we will not repent, Jesus has one message for us: "Woe to you" (Matt. 11:21).

This is why his demand for repentance is part of his central message concerning the kingdom of God. He preached that the long-awaited kingdom of God is present in his ministry. "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). The gospel—the good news—is that the rule of God has arrived in Jesus to save sinners before the kingdom arrives at his second coming in judgment. So the demand to repent is based on the gracious *offer* that is present to forgive and on the gracious *warning* that someday those who refuse the offer will perish in God's judgment.

TO ALL NATIONS BEGINNING FROM JERUSALEM

After he had risen from the dead, Jesus made sure that his apostles would continue the call for repentance throughout the world. He said, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that *repentance* and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 24:46-47). So the demand of Jesus to repent goes to all the nations. It comes to us, whoever we are and wherever we are, and lays claim on us. This is the demand of Jesus to every soul: Repent. Be changed deep within. Replace all God-dishonoring, Christ-belittling perceptions and dispositions and purposes with God-treasuring, Christ-exalting ones.

“This is now my favorite book by John Piper. In the best tradition of Adolf Schlatter’s *Do We Know Jesus?* and his ‘hermeneutic of perception,’ *What Jesus Demands from the World* has changed my life and will certainly change yours because it is based on the pure words of Jesus as revealed in the four Gospels. A must-read for every true follower of Christ.”

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MARK DRISCOLL, Pastor, Mars Hill Church, Seattle

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