

based on the book by

JOHN PIPER

Bible study by BRIAN J. TABB

WHAT
JESUS
DEMANDS
FROM THE
WORLD



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CONTENTS

<i>About The Gospel Coalition</i>	4
<i>How to Use this Study</i>	6
<i>Introduction</i>	7

SESSION 1 YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN	8
---	----------

SESSION 2 LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, SOUL, MIND, AND STRENGTH .	32
---	-----------

SESSION 3 LOVE YOUR ENEMIES	56
--	-----------

SESSION 4 RENDER TO CAESAR	80
---	-----------

SESSION 5 LAY UP TREASURES IN HEAVEN	106
---	------------

SESSION 6 MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS	132
--	------------

ABOUT THE GOSPEL COALITION

The Gospel Coalition is a fellowship of evangelical churches deeply committed to renewing our faith in the gospel of Christ and to reforming our ministry practices to conform fully to the Scriptures. We have become deeply concerned about some movements within traditional evangelicalism that seem to be diminishing the church's life and leading us away from our historic beliefs and practices. On the one hand, we are troubled by the idolatry of personal consumerism and the politicization of faith; on the other hand, we are distressed by the unchallenged acceptance of theological and moral relativism. These movements have led to the easy abandonment of both biblical truth and the transformed living mandated by our historic faith. We not only hear of these influences, we see their effects. We have committed ourselves to invigorating churches with new hope and compelling joy based on the promises received by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

We believe that in many evangelical churches a deep and broad consensus exists regarding the truths of the gospel. Yet we often see the celebration of our union with Christ replaced by the age-old attractions of power and affluence, or by monastic retreats into ritual, liturgy, and sacrament. What replaces the gospel will never promote a mission-hearted faith anchored in enduring truth working itself out in unashamed discipleship eager to stand the tests of kingdom-calling and sacrifice. We desire to advance along the King's highway, always aiming to provide gospel advocacy, encouragement, and education so that current and next-generation church leaders are better equipped to fuel their ministries with principles and practices that glorify the Savior and do good to those for whom He shed His life's blood.

We want to generate a unified effort among all peoples—an effort that is zealous to honor Christ and multiply His disciples, joining in a true coalition for Jesus. Such a biblically grounded and united mission is the only enduring future for the church. This reality compels us to stand with others who are stirred by the conviction that the mercy of God in Jesus Christ is our only

hope of eternal salvation. We desire to champion this gospel with clarity, compassion, courage, and joy—gladly linking hearts with fellow believers across denominational, ethnic, and class lines.

Our desire is to serve the church we love by inviting all our brothers and sisters to join us in an effort to renew the contemporary church in the ancient gospel of Christ so we truly speak and live for Him in a way that clearly communicates to our age. As pastors, we intend to do this in our churches through the ordinary means of His grace: prayer, ministry of the Word, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the fellowship of the saints. We yearn to work with all who seek the lordship of Christ over the whole of life with unabashed hope in the power of the Holy Spirit to transform individuals, communities, and cultures.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study guide freely adapts and uses material from John Piper's *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006). I write in my own style and I point readers to the relevant chapter or chapters from John's book at the end of each session.

I would like to thank Brian Daniel from LifeWay, Collin Hansen from The Gospel Coalition, David Mathis from Desiring God, and John Piper for inviting me to write this study guide—and for their assistance in various ways to see the project through to completion. Additionally, I acknowledge the support of the leadership of Bethlehem College & Seminary and the invaluable encouragement of my wife, Kristin Tabb, who proofread the study and made many helpful comments. *Soli Deo Gloria.*

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

ATTEND EACH GROUP EXPERIENCE

WATCH the video teaching.

PARTICIPATE in the group discussions.

COMPLETE THE INDIVIDUAL STUDY

READ the daily lessons and complete the activity questions.

MEMORIZE each week's suggested memory verse.

BE HONEST with yourself and others about your thoughts, your questions, and your experiences as you study and apply the material.

ASK GOD to show you His truth about each command so that you can be faithful and obedient to Jesus.

OBTAIN AND READ THE BOOK

What Jesus Demands from the World by John Piper
from Crossway, 2006, ISBN 978-1-4335-2057-0

INTRODUCTION

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.

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 impossible. 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.

YOU MUST BE BORN

AGAIN

SESSION 1

Group Discussion

START

Welcome to this group discussion of *What Jesus Demands from the World*.

To facilitate introductions and to introduce the theme of *What Jesus Demands from the World*, read aloud Matthew 28:18–20 and discuss the following questions.

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

MATTHEW 28:18-20

How do you understand Jesus’ demand to make disciples?

If explaining to friends, what would you tell them about Jesus’ promise to be with us always?

WHAT JESUS DEMANDS

To prepare to view the DVD segment, read aloud John 3:1–8:

¹ Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." ³ Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' 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."

WATCH

View session 1 on the DVD and use the following bullet points as a guide.

- Scripture doesn't just command believers to inform others of all the commandments but instead to speak, teach, and pray in such a way that people actually do what Jesus commands.
- Jesus has two categories for human beings: dead-living people and living-living people. We were all born dead and need new life in Christ.
- You can't follow Jesus' demands unless you have been born again. You'll hate His commands if you're not a child of God. You must have life.

RESPOND

Discuss the DVD segment with your group using the questions below.

What about the video clip resonated with you the most?

What does it mean to you to “speak, teach, and pray in such a way that people actually do what Jesus commands”?

What are your thoughts on the two categories given to people in this video? Take a moment to discuss this imagery in your group.

If perfect obedience in Jesus’ commands is an impossible feat, why do we strive for this kind of obedience? What should we hope to gain?

PRAY

Use this time to close your group discussion by praying for one another. Bullet points are provided to guide your prayer.

- Ask God to open up your hearts and minds to what He has to teach you in this study.
- Praise Him for sending Jesus to die in your place.
- Pray that God would teach your group the magnitude of what it means to be born again as discussed in the individual study this week.

Read the individual study for session 1 and complete the activity questions before the next group discussion.

Individual Study

This Week's Scripture Memory

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

JOHN 3:3

Books, media reports, and sermons commonly refer to “born again Christians,” but what does that phrase mean? In his best-selling autobiography *Born Again*, Charles Colson describes his powerful conversion while in prison for the Watergate scandal.¹ The Barna research group uses the label “born again” for people “who say they have made ‘a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in their life today’ and who also indicated they believe that when they die they will go to Heaven because they had confessed their sins and had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior.”² The evangelist Billy Graham says, “Have you been born again? Call it conversion, call it commitment, call it repentance, call it being saved, but has it happened to you? Does Christ live in your heart? Do you know it? Many people have thought a long time about religion and Christianity and yet have never made a commitment. Are you committed to Jesus Christ?”³

This session will explore Jesus' demand that we must be “born again.” We will see that to be born again is more than a personal decision, more than membership in a religious group or a political voting block, and more than a Christian cliché. Fundamentally, to be born again means to receive and experience new spiritual life from God. We will consider our need for new birth (Day 1), God's work in new birth (Day 2), Jesus' related demand that we repent (Day 3), and we will see how new birth leads to coming to Jesus and true worship (Days 4–5).

DAY 1**THE NEED FOR NEW BIRTH**

John's Gospel introduces us to a man named Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee—an expert in the Scriptures—and a ruler of the Jews. He was also a respectable and important religious leader (see John 3:1). Nicodemus saw Jesus perform signs in Jerusalem. He may have been present when Jesus drove the merchants and animals from the temple with a whip (see John 2:14–15). And so he came to Jesus by night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him” (John 3:2). Jesus’ teaching about new birth and the kingdom of God explodes Nicodemus’s human categories and exposes that this esteemed scholar is in the dark concerning the true ways of God. Nicodemus asks, “How can these things be?” Jesus challenges him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?” (John 3:9–10).

Read John 3:1–10. How does this passage present Nicodemus positively and negatively?

<i>Positive</i>	<i>Negative</i>

What do you think surprised or confused Nicodemus about Jesus’ teaching?

Nicodemus has religious pedigree, credentials, and influence, but in this passage he has only questions. He is curious about Jesus but also misunderstands Jesus’ words. He comes to Jesus under the cover of night, but to truly understand, he needs Jesus to shine light into the darkness of his life.

THE DEAD CANNOT SEE

Nicodemus claims that he can see and understand something of who Jesus is from these miracles. However, Jesus insists, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). The Jewish scholar doesn’t get it: “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). A person may be born into a religious family, may receive biblical education, may be a law-abiding, moral person, and may even hold a religious job, and yet may be spiritually dead and ignorant of the true reality of God’s saving rule. Nicodemus was. 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).

Earlier you read how Billy Graham defined “born again.” What do you think Jesus meant when He commanded us to be “born again”?

Author D. A. Carson writes, “To a Jew with the background and convictions of Nicodemus, ‘to see the kingdom of God’ was to participate in the kingdom at the end of the age, to experience eternal, resurrection life.”⁴ Nicodemus would have also assumed that because of his Jewish piety and heritage he would surely participate in this coming kingdom. Later in the chapter John writes this:

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

JOHN 3:36

How does this verse explain Jesus' teaching about seeing the kingdom?

What are some false reasons why people assume that they will participate in this coming kingdom?

THE DEAD CANNOT UNDERSTAND

We have seen that Jesus' teaching about the need to be born again baffled the great biblical scholar Nicodemus. Those who are physically living yet spiritually dead cannot "see" the kingdom of God or eternal life and also cannot "understand" spiritually revealed truths. Paul writes, "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14). Jesus makes the same point to His venerated night-time guest in John 3:10–12:

¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things?" ¹¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?"

WHAT JESUS DEMANDS

You see, Jesus divides all people into two groups. Those born only once are born of the flesh, are spiritually dead, and do not understand and believe Jesus' teaching. Those who are "born again" by the Spirit receive Jesus' testimony about heavenly things and are alive to God to see His saving rule as true and glorious.

Nicodemus thought he knew what it took to "see" the kingdom of God. From your understanding and study thus far, what does it take to "see" the kingdom of God?

Have you experienced the new birth that Jesus describes? If yes, reflect on what new birth means to you and how your life is different now.

The person who is ignorant or unskilled needs education. The sick or injured require medical attention. The depressed or troubled may seek counseling. Sinners who are liable to God's judgment and the spiritually dead do not fundamentally need new knowledge, moral reform, or religious affiliation—they need new life. We must be born again. We need to experience the supernatural transforming work of God in our lives. That's what Jesus demands.

FURTHER READING

John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 37–39 (Demand 1).

KNOWING JESUS

BY KNOWING HIS COMMANDS

The four Gospels are filled with demands from Jesus. These demands are Jesus' way of showing us who He is and what He expects of us. They are not harsh demands originating from a selfish desire to control, but rather loving directions for our good and ultimate satisfaction. *What Jesus Demands from the World* is a six-session Bible study that will guide group members through some of these demands with the ultimate end of glorifying God through obedience to His Son.

ALSO AVAILABLE *What Jesus Demands from the World Kit* includes resources for leading a six-session group study: one Bible study book and one DVD with six teaching sessions featuring John Piper. Item 005644091

DIGITAL RESOURCES: E-book and video available at lifeway.com/WhatJesusDemands



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