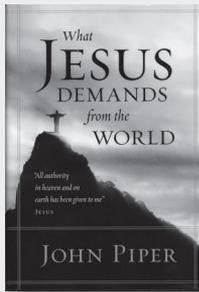


# Book Notes

*What Jesus Demands from the World*, by John Piper. (400 pp., ISBN 1-58134-845-2. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2006)

—reviewed by Ralph D. Winter



When John Piper had completed 25 years of ministry at the Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, the church gave

him a five month vacation to study and to work at Cambridge University. The book that resulted from that time is an unusually different book from most of his others in its thoroughness of preparation, length and coverage. The title may throw you off, but the best interpretation I have of it is that he is studying the commands of Jesus Christ, those very same commands which, as his first sentences imply, derive from the Great Commission itself, where the purpose of Jesus' final commission is that his disciples teach people to "obey" his teachings.

Apparently this extended period of study allowed John to work very systematically through the four Gospels, in effect combing out all the commands of Jesus Christ. It's significant that the Scripture quotations throughout the book come mainly from the Gospels (although he cites over 200 passages from the Old Testament). There are almost 800 from the book of Matthew, over 100 from Mark, over 300 from Luke, almost 350 from John and only two from the rest of the New Testament.

This is quite obviously a very thorough study of the Gospels. His introductory comments make it clear that—without any fancy conjectures about what else might be true—the Gospels are in his mind by far the most reliable, and even the most radical, portrayal of Jesus Christ.

Piper starts out with the Great Commission itself (intentionally misquoting it at first), saying that "Jesus' final command was to teach all his commandments." Then, while the reader reflects on that, he goes on to say that this really isn't what he said, but rather that they should "teach people to observe all my commandments."

Has anyone ever made so compendious a collection of all the commands of Jesus Christ and organized them into fifty short chapters for the benefit of the reader? The resulting book is a neat compendium of the Christian life, the way of life that Jesus actually intended us to follow.

However, in my mind we also need to be concerned to ask the question, "*What would Jesus have said* had his hearers had the additional knowledge of God's creation, and of evil, that we have gained in the last 2000 years?" It is apparent that we must understand what Jesus meant in his original context to understand what he means today, but beyond that we must ask the additional question as to what he was unable to say to those people for the lack of the kind of knowledge we have about disease and the like. Tellingly, the words *Satan*, *disease* and *sickness* do not appear in the subject index. On two adjoining pages are the only two references to the word *healing*.

This latter situation is the most surprising in a way, because Piper's interpretation of Jesus' healing ministry is that it merely verifies and validates his messiahship and divinity, not that it also portrays God's love and concern for suffering people. As a result there is no implication in the book that we should get out and fight against the kind of evil that brings more suffering upon the face of the earth than any other, namely

the onslaught of biological perversions that, in my opinion, are satanic. The great virtue of this book—namely that it sticks so meticulously close to the text—is in some ways a limitation. This is because any of the wide range of modern duties that believers might feel obligated to accept (for example, in the way of fighting against poverty and disease) would seem to be omitted almost automatically.

John has been a good friend for many years and this book is a marvelously competent collection of specifically every single command Jesus gave. It is probably the most thorough exposition ever made of the statement at the end of Matthew that his disciples were to teach people to obey everything he commanded. This book really does attempt to cover "everything he commanded."

In the last 2000 years, a great deal of additional insight has been gained by devout followers of Jesus Christ into the very nature of creation and of the satanic distortion of that creation and the delusions which have bedeviled human beings down through the centuries.

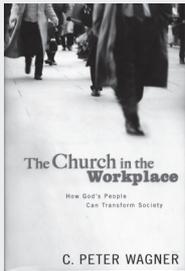
In Jesus' day there simply was no obvious possibility of forming mission societies and getting them incorporated and tax exempt and sending teams on planes into the dark spots of the world to counteract the works of Satan. The Gospels and this book, faithfully following those Gospels, primarily talk about the kinds of individual responsibilities that most preacher's sermons send people out through the doors of the church to live out. The very idea of strategic warring against the Devil, as we see later on in the New Testament (for example, in 1 John 3:8 "the Son of God appeared for this purpose, that he might destroy the works of the Devil"), doesn't come into the picture. Yet today, we have immensely different tools available in the obedience of Jesus Christ. And while nothing in this book or in the Gospels is out-of-date in the original sense of the statement, nevertheless we have far more of an

idea of what Jesus may have meant when he said “Greater works will you do than I have done.”

This leads to a few observations about a related book.

*The Church in the Workplace*, by C. Peter Wagner. (178 pp., ISBN 0-8307-3909-2, Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2006)

—reviewed by Ralph D. Winter



Peter Wagner is another good friend from across the years, a man whom I greatly admire. His book is, in a way, just as industrious a piece of workmanship as John Piper's. At first glance, Wagner's book may seem to have little to do with what Piper has written about obeying Christ's commands (see review, p. 44). Take, however, Wagner's idea in this book that the church of Jesus Christ exists in two main modes: the “nuclear church” (usually “organized church”) and the “extended church.” This “extended church” refers to believers and the activities they engage in when they go out into the world and seek to obey Christ's commands, not just “after hours,” but during the 40-hour week.

Wagner's great achievement is his studious and thoroughgoing treatment of over 100 books on the subject of “faith at work” as a generic phrase in the preparation of this book. In fact, he records a major turning point in his ministry as he launches forth in this new emphasis upon the church and the workplace. In typical Wagner style, his prose is crystal clear and his thinking well systematized. Being the master teacher that he is, he makes his views clear and exciting.

The key phrase of this book is “social transformation,” which is the end

product of an active “extended church” in its goals and purposes. It seems very important to Wagner and to many others, including myself, that focus upon eternity is incomplete without an equivalent concern for the will of God to be accomplished in this world. And in that sense, Peter Wagner's book is an outstanding contribution.

Two things disturb me, however. One derives from the fact that Wagner is writing to business people (who will rejoice to see someone recognize what they're doing as God work). Given his audience, it would seem that, in one of his chapters, he feels he needs to disavow any kind of frugal lifestyle that might be displeasing to business people whose money may exceed their needs and who very often employ the use of funds in ways that hard-pressed missionaries don't. He himself talks about being converted from a “spirit of poverty” inherited from his own missionary background.

He very effectively describes, in anthropological terms, the differences between the culture of the business world and the culture of the church—and many of his insights are arresting. Obviously, there are some in the church who feel that all profit making is bad, so at one point he addresses this, pointing out that profit is essential to paying employees and things like that. That, of course, doesn't really deal with the problem, since it is the profit beyond all expenses that is the matter of concern, and where the ethical issues arise. Wagner, in this instance, follows the average modern person's interpretation of Wesley's famous saying, “Earn all you can, save all you can, get all you can.” The actual meaning of the phrase is earn all you can, *economize all you can*, and give all you can, whereas the usual interpretation (including Wagner's) is that saving means investing. Obviously there is an inherent tension between investing all you can and giving all you can. You can't do both.

The most notable feature that is lacking, in my point of view, is the absence of any reference to the problem of disease and the need to fight it. Obviously, curing

people doesn't do away with the diseases themselves. You would think that, if you were to go out in the world and fight the battles of the Lord, and if the single greatest killer and producer of suffering on the face the earth by far is disease, that disease would be mentioned in either Piper's book or in Wagner's book. Unfortunately, I could not find it in either.

*One World or Many: The Impact of Globalization on Mission*, edited by Richard Tiplady. (276 pp., ISBN 0-87808-451-7, Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2003)

—reviewed by Ralph D. Winter

A book to take note of in the series sponsored by the World Evangelical Alliance is *One World or Many*, which tackles the whole question of globalization and what that does to the cause of missions. Probably the most significant statement in the whole book, actually, is in the forward written by Samuel Escobar,

One of the evangelical, missiological trends after Lausanne 1974, posed forcefully the need for evangelists and missionaries to become aware of how their culture shaped not only their missionary methodologies, but also their versions of the Gospel in ways that were in open contrast with Biblical teachings and theological conviction. (pg. v)

Probably one of the chief disturbances in mission thinking today is a recognition that syncretism, as a dread development in field churches, is masked by the possibility of syncretism in our own theology and in our own theological tradition, and thus the decontextualization of our own tradition is equally as important as the contextualization of that tradition for overseas work.

There are many other values to this book. It should not be overlooked. **IJFM**