

JOHN PIPER



SPECTACULAR **SINS**



And Their Global Purpose in **THE GLORY OF CHRIST**

“When it comes to holocausts or other horrors, most of us assume God has his hands tied and his back to the wall. We figure the devil wreaks havoc when God’s not looking; we rationalize the Lord’s ‘mistakes,’ figuring he absentmindedly took his hands off the wheel when tragedies happen. But John Piper paints a different picture from the pages of Scripture that will strengthen your heart, bolster your faith, and deepen your understanding of the ‘largeness’ of God’s sovereignty.”

Joni Eareckson Tada, Joni and Friends International Disability Center

“I had to read this book twice. The weighty truths about the sovereign wisdom and power of God unpacked in these pages created in me an overwhelming feeling of gratitude and ultimate safety. To be reminded of his might over everything is priceless, and I don’t think I’ll ever be able to preach the same again.”

Matt Chandler, Lead Pastor, The Village Church, Highland Village, Texas

“Pastors, make sure your people read this book! I know of no one who has so clearly addressed the relationship of man’s sin and God’s sovereignty as John has done in *Spectacular Sins*.”

Randy Pope, Pastor, Perimeter Church, Duluth, GA

“*Spectacular Sins and Their Global Purpose in the Glory of Christ*. Wow! *Spectacular* and *sin*! I’ve never seen those words together before. And who but John Piper could so brilliantly weave them into the same lyric as the global, purposeful glory of Christ! This man never ceases to inspire me to be more awestruck with the supremacy of Jesus.”

Chris Tomlin, song-writer and lead worshiper

“‘Wimpy worldviews make wimpy Christians’—this is the repeated refrain in these pages. But there is nothing wimpy about the worldview provided in *Spectacular Sins*. It dares to ask—and answer—the most daunting question for the Christian: ‘Why do sin, suffering, and evil exist in a world where God is sovereign?’ Dr. Piper has provided an honest, biblical, and pastoral theodicy for our generation. These pages turn the lights on in the darkest room of Christian theology.”

Rick Holland, Executive pastor, Grace Community Church and Director of the Resolved Conference

“It is impossible to truly apprehend the magnificent comfort of God’s sovereignty before we first consider that sovereignty in light of pain, suffering, evil, and sin. In this little book, John Piper is sending the church a precious gift by demonstrating how the fallenness of this world has been designed for our ultimate good and God’s ultimate glory. It is a biblical, impassioned plea for this generation to consider God’s world in light of God’s word. He who has an ear, let him hear!”

Miles V. Van Pelt, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi

“I wish I could have read this book as a new Christian as I was unprepared to face calamity because of my deficient view of God’s sovereignty. I am delighted now as a young pastor to be able to hand my congregation this book that will enable them to see and worship God in their suffering.”

Darrin Patrick, Pastor of The Journey, St. Louis

“Don’t let the small size of this book fool you. Like most of Piper’s writings, it’s wonderfully dangerous and critically needed in our day—especially in the Western world. This is a stick of gospel dynamite that has the potential of radically altering the way you view suffering and evil forever—on both a personal and global scale. But I must warn you. Don’t expect to find in this book all the typical, soft ‘words of comfort’ espoused by many in our day to help people maximize pleasure by minimizing or rationalizing away the pain of suffering. Instead prepare yourself to have your mind renewed by the deep, weighty truths of God’s word, your faith strengthened by a renewed vision of God’s supremacy in all things (including evil), and your courage bolstered in the face of the inevitable suffering that lies ahead to follow hard by faith after the One whose death was the most spectacular sin—for the sake of the nations and the glory of God. Only this can bring you the true comfort of God in the face of suffering and evil. I highly recommend it!”

Steven L. Childers, President & CEO, Global Church Advancement; Associate Professor of Practical Theology, Reformed Theological Seminary, Orlando, Florida

Spectacular Sins

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INTRODUCTION:
THE TIMES ARE
CHANGING

When the Bruised Heart Needs a Tire Iron

Jesus Christ, who was in the beginning with God, and *was* God (John 1:1), created the universe. He did this as God the Father's equal and as his agent. "All things were made *through* him" (John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2). And he did it to display his glory. "*By* him all things were created . . . and *for* him" (Col. 1:16). *By* him and *for* him. All things were created by Christ and for Christ. The Son of God, who has become a human being—the God-man, Jesus of Nazareth—in perfect concert with his Father, created the universe for the display of his all-satisfying glory.

Not only that, he holds it all together with total authority. "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3). How this massive power—to create and uphold the universe—is wielded to display the glory of Christ is the great issue of our time, and of all time.

THE GREATEST DISPLAY OF THE
GLORY OF CHRIST

The apex of the glory of Christ is the glory of his grace—treating people infinitely better than they deserve—giving himself for

the everlasting joy of the worst of sinners who will have him as their highest Treasure. And the apex of this grace is the murder of the God-man outside Jerusalem around A.D. 33. The death of Jesus Christ was murder. It was the most spectacular sin ever committed.

At the all-important pivot of human history, the worst sin ever committed served to show the greatest glory of Christ and obtain the sin-conquering gift of God's grace. God did not just overcome evil at the cross. He made evil serve the overcoming of evil. He made evil commit suicide in doing its worst evil.

Evil is anything and everything opposed to the fullest display of the glory of Christ. That's the meaning of evil. In the death of Christ, the powers of darkness did their best to destroy the glory of the Son of God. This is the apex of evil. But instead they found themselves quoting the script of ancient prophecy and acting the part assigned by God. Precisely in putting Christ to death, they put his glory on display—the very glory that they aimed to destroy. The apex of evil achieved the apex of the glory of Christ. The glory of grace.

TO SEE THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY

When you see this, and feel the force of it, the way you look at the world changes. I am writing this book because I think the days that are coming will demand from the followers of Christ this change in the way we look at the world. It seems to me that Christians in the West are being coddled. We suffer little in the name of Christ. Therefore, we read the Bible not with a desperate hunger for evidences of God's triumph in pain, but with a view to improving our private pleasures.

Therefore, we read the Bible selectively. We pick a text here and there to fit our felt needs. This is like a doctor who forgets how to write prescriptions for the best antibiotics because everybody seems healthy, and he has spent the last decades tweaking good health with hip-hop exercise videos, unaware that pestilence

is at the door. It's like the soldier who forgets how to use his weapons because the times seem peaceful, and he has spent the last decades doing relief work and teaching the children how to play games.

THE TIMES ARE CHANGING

But the times are changing. For seventy million baby boomers, for example, life has changed. It seems very short now. What used to be a fond nostalgia for the sixties has turned into an ache that the beloved decade is now so far away that its main meaning is: we are dying. Different ages get the message in different ways.

And not only life, but the world too is shrinking. People who don't like Christians are all around us. Only a strange providence keeps our churches from being bombed. It is only a matter of time till the reality of the rest of the world comes home. And all the while we are called by Christ to go to *them*, love them, sacrifice for them, bring the gospel to them. The Great Commission is not child's play. It is costly. Very costly.

The coddled Western world will sooner or later give way to great affliction. And when it does, whose vision of God will hold? Where are Christians being prepared for great global sorrows? Where is the Christian mind and soul being prepared for the horrors to come? Christians in the West are weakened by wimpy worldviews. And wimpy worldviews make wimpy Christians. God is weightless in our lives. He is not terrifyingly magnificent. His sovereignty is secondary (at best) to his sensitivity.

THE MISSING BIBLE

What is missing is the Bible. I mean the whole Bible, with its blood and guts and sins and horrors—and all of it under the massive hand of God. The hand whose fingers flick stars into being. The hand that gives life and takes it. The hand that rules everything. Everything. What we need is to know the great things about God. Knowing great things about God will help

make us ready not to collapse under cataclysmic conflict and personal catastrophe.

THE BRUISED HEART AND THE TIRE IRON

I am aware that these things seem emotionally distant and unrelated to the personal pains of many. In our quiet daily miseries of marriage or parenting or loneliness or sickness or depression, we may feel that all this talk about the grandeur of God is like trying to heal a bruised heart with a tire iron. I know that God is tender, and that personal fellowship with him is sweet, and that touching the heart happens through the brokenness of the still, small voice. I know this, and I love it. Jesus Christ is a precious friend to me.

But I also know something else. If, while I am having a tender conversation with my wife, a man breaks in and kills her and all my children and leaves me wounded on the living room floor, I will need a way of seeing the world that involves more than the tenderness of God. If pestilence takes out tens of thousands of my fellow citizens and half my church, my mental and spiritual survival will depend on more than the precious gifts of God's intimacy.

CATASTROPHES ARE COMING

I am writing this book to build a vision of God into our lives that will not let us down in the worst of times. I mean really bad times. Horrific times. Who is prepared to meet the Agony that is coming?

Our worship services and our preaching too often pamper us. They coddle. I am not opposed to friends helping us with the daily frustrations that make us unhappy. There is plenty of proverbial wisdom in the Bible to warrant this. It is good. Love does this. I need this help. I want it. There is a time for everything under heaven, even pampering. But surely the preaching of God's word must aim for more than this.

Global cataclysms and personal catastrophes are coming. I say this not as one with my finger in the wind, but with my finger in the Bible. “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). “You yourselves know that we are destined for [these afflictions]” (1 Thess. 3:3). “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). We are “fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him” (Rom. 8:17). “Not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23).

“YOUR BROTHER AND PARTNER IN THE TRIBULATION”

I have shepherded too many Christians through death in the best of times to think that any times are easy. But hard times are coming. Times are coming that have already been. Times when we will speak again the way John spoke on the island of Patmos. We will write to one another and, with no sense of melodrama, sign our letters, “Your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus” (Rev. 1:9). Few write like this now in the West. But we will.

Times are coming when shepherds will say again to their flock, as they have done in days gone by, “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). I am deeply thankful for Christian counseling to make my marriage better. But in addition, I need a shepherd who will tell me: “The devil may kill you, but that’s okay. Jesus will give you the crown of life.”

THE BEAST WILL WIN . . . FOR A SEASON

Along with the tender words of daily blessings, I need the tough warning that the Beast will win. For a season. “[The Beast] was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them . . . and . . . cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain” (Rev. 13:7, 15). I need the warning that the great Babylonian whore will one day be “drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (Rev. 17:6).

These horrors are in the Bible. God’s word. Where is the shepherd who is preparing the saints for this kind of future? What answer could he give to our questions? What answer would fit with the upbeat entertainment mood? Where in the West do we hear the answer: “They have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death” (Rev. 12:11)?

OUR FELT NEEDS ARE ABOUT TO CHANGE

The fact that people do not feel a need for this kind of food in their spiritual diet should not silence the wise and loving shepherd. Our felt needs are about to change dramatically. Pastors will be glad if they are ahead of the curve. Otherwise, it may be too late. Coddled people will not be good listeners when their world collapses. They will be numb with confusion and rage at the God who wasn’t supposed to allow this. “If this is the way God is, why didn’t you tell us?”

The aim of this book is not to meet felt needs, but to awaken needs that will soon be felt, and then to save your faith and strengthen your courage when evil prevails. These are big, deep, weighty, strong truths. Truths for pestilence and war and personal calamity. These truths are made of steel. I know that a tire iron cannot caress a bruised heart, but if your car is rolling

over on you and about to crush you, a cold, steel perpendicular tire iron might save your life. Then later, at home, as you tell the story, tears will flow, and Jesus will hold you as you sob for joy.

THE “SUCCESS” OF SIN IN THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

My aim is to show that sin and evil, no matter how spectacular, never nullify the decisive, Christ-exalting purposes of God. No, my aim is more than that. These spectacular sins do not just *fail* to nullify God’s purpose to glorify Christ, they *succeed*, by God’s unfathomable providence, in making his gracious purpose come to pass. This truth is the steel God offers to put in the spine of his people as they face the worst calamities. There will be tenderness in due time. But if the back of our faith is broken because we think God is evil or absent, who will welcome him when he comes with caresses?

THE AIM IS LOVE

In the end, my aim, as I will make clear as we go along, is that you will be given the strength and courage of never-failing love toward all people, including your enemies (Matt. 5:43–44). “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor. 13:7). There will be much to endure. Without a way of seeing the world that can deal with massive evil and unremitting pain under the supremacy of Christ, we will collapse in self-pity or rage. This is the opposite of love. If we are to endure and bear and believe and hope, we need to see the spectacular sins of history the way God sees them.

I hope this book helps. The assumption is that telling the stories of these sins as they are told in the Bible will be as helpful as writing a formal theology of providence. Once the stories are in place, you then have a lifetime to trace out all their implications in larger books than this.

HOW A LITTLE WINDOW WORKS

This book is small. But my prayers for it are large. Sometimes, if you put your eye close enough, the smallest pinhole can reveal a new world. It isn't the size of the window that determines how much you see. It's which way the window is facing, and how close you are, and whether the glass is clear. The little window of this book is facing toward the Son of God and the triumphs of his glory through some of the most spectacular sins of history. The glass I have used in building this window is the Bible. If I am not faithful to what the Christian Scriptures teach, you should take your leave. I hope that you will come close to the pane so that the fullest panorama is visible.

SPECTACULAR
SINS

GOD SOVEREIGN OVER HUMAN SIN

The Impulses Behind This Book

The king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by God.

2 CHRONICLES 10:15

“Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets. The LORD has declared disaster concerning you.”

2 CHRONICLES 18:22

Amaziah would not listen, for it was of God, in order that he might give them into the hand of their enemies, because they had sought the gods of Edom.

2 CHRONICLES 25:20

The first impulse to write this book came when we were on vacation in 2007. I was sitting on a porch in Asheville, North Carolina. It was midsummer, and that means I was in 2 Chronicles. My through-the-Bible-in-a-year reading plan¹ had put me in the same place in the Bible that it does every summer. Reading the Bible with the same plan every year makes for some interesting associations in my mind between towns and texts. The association with Asheville that year was God’s sovereignty over demonic evil and human sin.

¹See www.hopeingod.org/BibleReadingPlan.aspx.

WHAT I SAW IN ASHEVILLE

Here's a glimpse of what I was seeing and what I mean by God's sovereignty over sin. I'm sitting there on the porch looking out over the Blue Ridge Mountains (and they really are blue at certain times of day), and I am reading things like this:

A Turn of Affairs Brought about by God

First, Solomon, king of Israel, had died. His son Rehoboam was about to be made king. Jeroboam, who had opposed Solomon and was driven into exile in Egypt, returned quickly and gathered the people behind him as a popular leader. He took the people and stood before Rehoboam and offered to serve him if he would lighten their load. "Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke on us, and we will serve you" (2 Chron. 10:4).

Rehoboam sought counsel from the old men. They counseled wisely, "If you will be good to this people and please them and speak good words to them, they will be your servants forever" (2 Chron. 10:7).

But Rehoboam abandoned the counsel of the old men and sought counsel from "the young men who had grown up with him." They gave foolish counsel: "Thus shall you speak to the people . . . 'My little finger is thicker than my father's thighs. And now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions'" (2 Chron. 10:10–11).

Rehoboam embraced the foolish counsel of the young men. The result was the tragic split of Israel into two warring kingdoms—ten tribes in the north and two tribes in the south. Why did Rehoboam react in this sinful and foolish way? There are layers of answers. But the writer of 2 Chronicles tells us the *ultimate* answer: "The king did not listen to the people, *for it was a turn of affairs brought about by God*" (2 Chron. 10:15).

This is what I mean by God's sovereignty over sin.

God Put a Lying Spirit in the Mouths of the Prophets

Second, a few chapters later Ahab, king of the northern tribes of Israel, made an alliance with Jehoshaphat, the king of the southern tribes. They would go to war together against Syria. Before going they sought counsel from the prophets. Four hundred prophets counseled them to go up against Syria. God would give it into their hands, they said (2 Chron. 18:11).

But these prophets were deceived. The one true prophet, Micaiah, described to the kings what had happened. He gave a window into heaven. He explained that among the hosts gathered before God there was a “lying spirit” who volunteered to deceive the prophets. “I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets” (2 Chron. 18:21). So God says, “You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so.” Then the true prophet Micaiah said to Ahab, “Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets. The LORD has declared disaster concerning you” (2 Chron. 18:22). Why did the prophets give false and destructive counsel to King Ahab? There are layers of answers. But the writer of 2 Chronicles gives the *ultimate* one: “The LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets.”

It Was of God

Third, one more illustration from what I was reading on the porch in Asheville. Seven chapters later in 2 Chronicles, Amaziah, the king of Judah, became bigheaded by a recent victory over the nation of Edom. In his pride, he decided to press his authority on the northern kingdom ruled by Joash.

Joash resisted and pointed out Amaziah’s pride: “You say, ‘See, I have struck down Edom,’ and your heart has lifted you up in boastfulness.” Then he gave him wise counsel: “Stay at home. Why should you provoke trouble so that you fall, you and Judah with you?” (2 Chron. 25:19).

But Amaziah would not forsake his pride and aggression.

Why? Again the answer has many layers. But the writer of 2 Chronicles gives us the *ultimate* answer: “Amaziah would not listen, *for it was of God*, in order that he might give them into the hand of their enemies, because they had sought the gods of Edom” (2 Chron. 25:20).

This is what I mean by the sovereignty of God over sin.²

THE IMPULSES GIVING RISE TO THIS BOOK

Why Does God Want Us to Know His Sovereignty over Sin?

Why does God think it is good for us to know this? Why does God tell us repeatedly in the Bible that, in some unfathomable way, he governs the sinful acts of men? We know that God him-

²I am aware that James 1:13–15 is a text some would use against this point. “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. (14) But each person is tempted when he is lured [*exelkomenos*] and enticed [*deleazomenos*] by his own desire. (15) Then desire when it has conceived [*syllabousa*] gives birth [*tikteti*] to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” There is no point in hiding each other’s problem texts. I am not allowed to pick and choose any more than I allow it to others. If I cannot make texts harmonize, I try to let them both stand until someone wiser than I can (even if I must wait for God’s final enlightenment in heaven).

My effort at understanding James 1:13, in view of all the examples of God’s willing that sinful actions come about, is to say that “tempt” is defined in verse 14 as being “dragged away” (*exelkomenos*) and “lured” (*deleazomenos*). In other words, James is not thinking of temptation in terms of an object of desire being put in front of someone (note that he does not attribute “temptation” to Satan, the arch-“tempter,” but to our “desire”). For example, temptation is not the pornography on display, in James’s way of thinking here; rather, it is the “dragging” and “luring” experienced in the heart that makes a person look at the pornography. He is thinking of temptation as the *engagement of the emotions in strong desires for evil*. This he calls the “conceiving” (*syllabousa*) stage of temptation before the actual “birth” (*tikteti*) of the act of sin (v. 15).

Thus it seems to me that James is saying that *God* never experiences this kind of “being dragged away” or “being lured.” And he does not directly (see Chapter Four, note 1) produce that “dragging” and “luring” toward evil in humans. In some way (that we may not be able to fully comprehend), God is able without blameworthy “tempting” to see to it that a person does what God ordains for him to do even if it involves evil.

But when James says that God “cannot be tempted by evil,” he is not saying that God cannot have objective enticements to evil put in front of him (for Jesus certainly was “tempted” in this sense in the wilderness), nor that he himself does not arrange events at times so that such enticements come before us, which may lead us, through the “dragging” of our desires, to sin (which God knew and, therefore, in one sense, willed). In fact, the Bible reveals that God tests (same word as “tempt” in Greek) his people often (cf. Heb. 11:17) by arranging their circumstances so that they are presented with dangerous acts of obedience that they might sinfully fear, or sinful pleasures that they might covet. In the end, what I say is that God is able to order events, if it seems wise and good to do so, such that sin comes about; yet he does so without “tempting” those who sin, as James says. See John Piper, “Are There Two Wills in God?” in Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce Ware, eds. *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 107–131.

self never sins or does anything evil or unholy. If there is one thing the Bible is clear about, it is that God is holy and does not sin. “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” (Rev. 4:8; see Isa. 6:3). “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). “God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one” (Jas. 1:13). “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Gen. 18:25). Yes. That is not up for grabs. God is just and holy and eternally without sin.

So why does God tell us about his sovereignty over sin? It troubles people. Why does he want us to know this? There must be some good reason. I want to know what that is. That’s the first impulse that gives rise to this book.

Why Does God Not Restrain Sin More Often?

The second impulse behind this book is the overwhelming evil in the world. Whatever month of the year you choose, heart-rending calamities fill the news from coast to coast and around the world. And if we had the connections to know about them, we would see that they fill our churches as well. Calamities strike the world of unbelievers and the children of God every day with mind-numbing pain. Some of these tragedies come directly from natural disasters, and some come directly from the sinful acts of man against man.

Just when you think violent crime in one state is decreasing, you read about a major city where the murder rate is up 50 percent in the last seven years. Just when you hear that drug use is on the decline among teenagers, you read about execution-style murders among our youth. Somewhere in the news miners are trapped deep underground, and family members are huddled in a church hoping against hope. An interstate bridge collapses, and a just-married husband doesn’t arrive home for supper—ever. Planes collide, and bodies fall from the sky. Trains explode in flesh-burning balls of flame. The most stable countries suddenly burst into ethnic violence, and headlines venture the term

genocide. A father throws his children off a bridge to spite his wife. Little girls are kidnapped and made to serve as sex slaves. Ethnic and religious minorities are systematically starved out of existence. Tsunamis sweep away whole villages and churches. Earthquakes bury thirty thousand people in a night. Suddenly twenty million people are displaced with South Asian flooding. And forty-six million pre-born babies are killed every year around the world.

Does this have anything to do with Jesus Christ—the risen king of the universe who stops the threatening wind and waves with a single word (Luke 8:24–25), who commands the dead and they live (John 11:43–44), who makes the lame walk and the blind see and the deaf hear (Matt. 11:5), who feeds five thousand with a few loaves of bread (Mark 6:41–42), who created the universe and everything in it (John 1:3), and who upholds the universe with the word of his power (Heb. 1:3) and says, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18)?

Surely, this Jesus can stop a tsunami, and make the wind blow a jet off its deadly course toward a crowded tower, and loosen the stranglehold of an umbilical cord from around an infant’s neck, and blind the eyes of torturers, and stop a drought. Surely he can do this and a thousand other acts of restraint and rescue. He has done it before. He could do it now. What is his reason for not doing it more often than he does? That is the second impulse that gives rise to this book.

How Can We Have Faith and Joy during the Severity of the Last Days?

Third, the Bible itself tells us that in the last days things will be difficult and severe. There will be much suffering, and it will not exclude the followers of Jesus. In 2 Timothy 3:1 Paul says, “Understand this, that in the last days there will come *times of difficulty*.” This statement is meant as a warning for Christians to expect trouble. Lots of trouble.

He goes on to explain that the source of this difficulty will

be pervasive sin. “People will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:2–5).

Together with human sinfulness, the last days will be permeated with natural calamities. It will be as though the earth is in the heavings of childbirth. “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains” (Matt. 24:7–8).

There will be sweeping hostilities toward Christians: “They will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake” (Matt. 24:9). “Because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold” (Matt. 24:12).

Tragedies and calamities and horrific suffering and sinful atrocities should not take Christians off guard. “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Pet. 4:12). They are foreseen by God, and he foretold them for us to know. God sees them coming and does not intend to stop them. Therefore, it appears that they somehow fit into his purposes.

Indeed, he says as much about the murder of his saints in Revelation 6:10–11. Those who had already been killed cry out in heaven, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” John describes the answer they receive: “They were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, *until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed* as they themselves had been.”

There is a number of martyrs to be filled. God knows how many murders of his children there must be. And God reigns

over every one of them. He does not spare his children physical death, but he does save them eternally: “Some of you they will put to death. . . . But not a hair of your head will perish” (Luke 21:16, 18).

As a pastor, I do not think it is my job to entertain you during the last days. It is not my calling to help you have chipper feelings while the whole creation groans. My job is to put the kind of ballast in the belly of your boat so that when these waves crash against your life, you will not capsize but make it to the harbor of heaven—battered and wounded, but full of faith and joy. That’s the third impulse that gives rise to this book.

How Is Christ Glorified in a World of Sin?

The fourth impulse behind this book is the ultimate aim of my life and ministry. Recently I went back almost three decades and listened to my candidating sermon at the church I still serve. It was January 27, 1980. I told that old and graying downtown church that I had one supreme passion and one simple goal. I learned it from my father, and I learned it from the apostle Paul.

I exist to magnify Jesus Christ. That is, I am on this planet for one ultimate reason: to do whatever I can to make Jesus Christ known and treasured—a knowing and a treasuring that accords with his infinite beauty and immeasurable worth. My text that Sunday was the clearest statement of this passion and goal in the Bible. The text was Philippians 1:20: “It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always *Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.*” Paul’s “eager expectation” is that Christ be made to look as great as he really is by the way Paul lives and dies. That’s my passion too.

This is the fourth impulse behind this book. How is Christ magnified in a world like ours? Or a world like 2 Chronicles? How is Christ magnified in the fall of Satan from his position of perfection? In the sin of Adam and the fall of the entire human

race into sin and misery? In the tower of Babel and the fracturing of the human race into thousands of languages? In the sale of Joseph into slavery in Egypt? In Israel's treason against God in demanding a human king to be like the nations? In the betrayal of the Son of God by the kiss of his friend?

SORROWFUL, YET ALWAYS REJOICING

Between Asheville and this book, I preached a series of messages under the title "Spectacular Sins and Their Global Purpose in the Glory of Christ." It marked the beginning of my twenty-eighth year of preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church. There was death that autumn, just like there had been death in the spring. My father and my granddaughter. The I-35 bridge over the Mississippi River collapsed. Darkness overcame the young. And steady-state suffering kept its inexorable pace. I write out of the way I experience the word of God. And what I experience almost every day is someone's pain. Sometimes my own. Always someone else's that, in part, becomes mine.

We are Christian Hedonists at Bethlehem. That means we believe and pursue the truth that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. But we also know that in this life, joy in God is never unmixed with sorrow. Never. Love won't allow that. Our banner bears the seal of 2 Corinthians 6:10, "sorrowful yet always rejoicing." We are pushing our way through a blood-spattered life that makes us feel connected to the world and disconnected at the same time. We are here but not here. Love binds us to the tragic earth, and love binds us to the Treasure of heaven. Christians are strange. Our emotions are inexplicable in ordinary terms. "[Let] those who [mourn] mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who [rejoice] rejoice as though they were not rejoicing" (1 Cor. 7:30). That is our experience. That is the daily context of this book.

CHRIST SOVEREIGN OVER ALL HOSTILE POWERS

All Things Were Created for Him

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

COLOSSIANS 1:15–16

God has not answered all of our questions about the sin and misery that are in the world. “The secret things belong to the LORD our God” (Deut. 29:29). There are mysteries we will not fathom while “we see in a mirror dimly” (1 Cor. 13:12). In this present age, we “know in part”; in the age to come we will know even as we are known (1 Cor. 13:12).

But God has not been silent about these things. There are things he wants us to know. The honor of his Son is at stake in the spectacular sins of history and their global purpose in the glory of Christ. The apostle Paul makes this clear in Colossians 1:9–20.

THE MOST CONCENTRATED DESCRIPTION OF CHRIST'S GLORIES

Paul has just prayed for the Colossians that they would “be filled with the knowledge of [God’s] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:9–10). In verse 14, he begins a litany of amazing truths about Jesus Christ that are probably the most concentrated description of the glories of Jesus in the entire Bible. I will mention them—all fifteen of them—and then come back to the one I want to focus on.

- In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (v. 14).
- He is the image of the invisible God (v. 15a).
- He is the firstborn of all creation—that is, the specially honored, first and only Son over all creation (v. 15b).
- By him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities (v. 16a).
- All things were created through him (v. 16b).
- All things were created for him (v. 16c).
- He is before all things (v. 17a).
- In him all things hold together (v. 17b).
- He is the head of the body, the church (v. 18a).
- He is the beginning (v. 18b).
- He is the firstborn from the dead (v. 18c).
- In everything he is preeminent (v. 18d).
- In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell (v. 19).
- He reconciles all things to himself, whether on earth or in heaven (v. 20a).
- He makes peace by the blood of his cross (v. 20b).

This is worth memorizing. If your heart ever wavers and grows cold, come here. Memorize this litany of glories, and ask God to give you affections that correspond to the measure of this greatness—infinite in beauty, immeasurable. If any person or any

power or any wisdom or any love awakens any admiration or any amazement or any joy, let it be the greatest person and the greatest power and the greatest wisdom and the greatest love that exists—Jesus Christ.

ALL THINGS CREATED BY, THROUGH, AND FOR JESUS CHRIST

But for our purposes in this book, we go back to verse 16. Notice the three prepositions: “For *by* him all things were created . . . all things were created *through* him and *for* him.” So Paul teaches us that Jesus Christ created all that is. They were created *through* him. And all things were created *for* him.

All that came into being exists for Christ—that is, everything exists to display the greatness of Christ. Nothing—nothing!—in the universe exists for its own sake. Everything—from the bottom of the oceans to the top of the mountains, from the smallest particle to the biggest star, from the most boring school subject to the most fascinating science, from the ugliest cockroach to the most beautiful human, from the greatest saint to the most wicked genocidal dictator—everything that exists, exists to make the greatness of Christ more fully known—including *you*, and the person you have the hardest time liking.

EVEN EVIL SUPERNATURAL POWERS

But of all the things—the millions of things Paul could have mentioned that Christ made and that exist for his glory—he chose to mention these: thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities. Verse 16: “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether *thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities*—[even these] were created through him and for him.”

Now Paul knows that these “rulers” and “authorities” include evil supernatural powers. We can see this in the next chapter. In Colossians 2:15, Paul celebrates Jesus’ triumph on the cross by

saying, “He disarmed the *rulers and authorities* and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” So here are the “rulers and authorities” that he referred to in Colossians 1:16. They are evil. Jesus died to disarm them.

They turn up again in Ephesians 6:12: “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but *against the rulers, against the authorities.*” They are, Paul says, “the cosmic powers over this present darkness . . . the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” They are evil supernatural powers that aim to deceive and destroy the human race.

According to Colossians 2:15, they have been decisively defeated at the cross where Jesus disarmed them and made his believing people completely secure. But they still do much harm in the world because not everyone believes, and even believers can be hurt by them, but not destroyed.

For example, Jesus said to the church in Smyrna, “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). The devil can imprison and kill God’s loved ones. But he cannot destroy them. That is the kind of power the rulers and authorities have.

FOR THE GLORY OF JESUS CHRIST

So where do these evil supernatural powers come from and why do they exist? Colossians 1:16 gives a decisive part of the answer. Not the whole answer, but the part we need to know. They come from Christ. “By him [by Christ, the Son of God!] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or *rulers or authorities.* . . .” That’s where they came from. They were created by Christ. And why do they exist? Verse 16b: “All things were created through him and *for him.*” They exist *for* Christ. They exist to make his glories known—to display his infinite beauty and immeasurable worth.

It doesn't say he created them *evil*. In fact, the little New Testament book of Jude speaks of "angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling" (Jude 6). They were created good, and they rebelled against God.

Paul knows this. He knows what they once *were* and what they *have become*. And we will see in the chapters to come that Paul knows something else. He knows that Christ knew they would fall before they fell. Christ knew that there would be sin and rebellion and evil. And with infinite wisdom he and his Father took it all into account as they planned the history of salvation and the triumphs of grace at Calvary.

Therefore, when Paul says, "rulers [and] authorities" were created by Christ and for Christ, he means that they were created knowing what they would become and how it is that precisely in that evil role they would glorify Christ—knowing everything they would become, they were created for the glory of Christ.

FUEL FOR A GOD-CENTERED FIRE

Now why would Paul tell us this? Is it helpful to know this? Paul certainly thinks so, because these evil powers are the one thing Paul chooses to mention as an example of what was created by Christ and for Christ. Of all the thousands of things he could have mentioned, he mentions these evil powers. He wants us to know this. Why? Why does he think this is good for us to know? That's what this book is about.

The main point of this book is not information for your heads, but application to your lives. I am thinking as I write of the way Paul was thinking about Timothy as he wrote his second letter to Timothy. In dealing with an intensely practical, and probably painful, matter in Timothy's life, Paul leads him back to the most profound, and even mind-boggling, doctrinal truth. Timothy is prone to anxiety. He is retiring and sometimes fearful. His timidity threatens the effectiveness of his ministry.

Paul wants to help him overcome his fear and be courageous. So Paul says, “Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God” (2 Tim. 1:8). That much we may expect. But then to help Timothy even more, he takes him into heavy theology.

He describes God in the next verse like this: “. . . [God] saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and *grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began.*” Paul tells timid Timothy that before there was any human sin in the world that needed grace, before Adam had sinned, before the world existed, God gave grace to Timothy in Christ Jesus for salvation. God had Timothy in view, and he had Jesus Christ in view, and he had grace in view, and he had salvation in view before there was any world or any human sin or any human guilt. That is heavy.

And why does he say it? Because Timothy is timid. Paul’s antidote for wimpy Christians is weighty doctrine. In Paul’s mind, the most massive truths are meant for producing radical lives of obedience. That’s why I say the *main* point of this book is not information for your head, but application to your life. There is truth. Weighty truth like the kind Paul unveiled for Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:9. But the aim is love and justice and purity and compassion and courage. All to the end that Christ might be known and treasured as infinitely beautiful and immeasurably valuable. Great biblical truths are fuel in the fire of the God-centered soul.

WHY THE TRUTH OF CHRIST’S SOVEREIGNTY?

In anticipation of what is coming, we will end this chapter with five summary statements about why God wants us to know the truth of Christ’s sovereignty over “rulers [and] authorities” and the way they are involved in the most spectacular sins of the

universe—as well as all the others. God’s sovereignty over sin in Jesus Christ is important to know for at least these five reasons.

First, God wants us to know this because *it is objectively true, not merely opinion or a merely human idea*. It is a fact. It is real, like the seat you are sitting on. Or the floor on which you stand. Or the mattress where you lie. Truth matters. People perish, Paul says, for not knowing and loving the truth. His heart aches for those “who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved” (2 Thess. 2:10).

Second, God wants us to know this truth because *it makes clear that Christ alone, not “rulers [and] authorities,” is to be worshipped*. Some people in Colossae were saying that the “worship of angels” (Col. 2:18) was part of the way up to God. No, Paul says, these angels that some think are so great—the good ones and the evil ones—were created by Christ and for Christ. Don’t worship them. Worship the one who made them.

Third, God wants us to know these things because *our day is not so unlike Paul’s. Paul was concerned that, in the pluralistic, intellectual atmosphere of Colossae, Christians could be captivated by high-sounding heresies*. “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8). Paul believed that the great truth of Christ’s sovereignty over sin and evil was a kind of ballast in our boats that would keep us from capsizing under the waves of error that roll endlessly over the sea of human culture. He believed that great truth would protect us from philosophies and traditions that do not cherish the supremacy of Christ. When you embrace truths like this, you are not easily swept away by man-centered trends or traditions.

Fourth, God wants us to know this truth *to make us valiant in the face of odds that seem overwhelming to the natural eye*. Paul wants to make crystal-clear that when Christians, who feel small and vulnerable, hear about hostile “thrones or dominions

or rulers or authorities,” they know beyond any doubt that Jesus Christ has all authority over them. He means to give us courage that these hostile powers cannot do anything apart from God’s sovereign permission (Job 1:12; Luke 22:31–32).

And therefore, finally, Paul tells us these things because *he wants us to see and feel that our salvation in Christ is invincible*. When Christ died for sin and rose again, “he disarmed the rulers and authorities” (Col. 2:15). If you have put your trust in him, here is what he says about you in Colossians 3:3–4: “You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” You are secure forever in Christ. Nothing can separate you from him, not even the most vicious cosmic powers (Rom. 8:38–39).

ALL THINGS SERVE HIS GLORY AND OUR GLADNESS

All things were created *by* him and *through* him and *for* him—even our worst supernatural enemies. In the end, it was they—not Christ—who were shamed at the cross (Col. 2:15). In the end, everything and everyone serves to magnify the glory of our Savior and increase the gladness of his people in him.

THE FALL OF SATAN AND THE VICTORY OF CHRIST

Why Does God Permit Satan to Live?

God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.

2 PETER 2:4

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

GENESIS 3:15

The devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

REVELATION 20:10

Vying for the most spectacular sin ever committed is the desire of once-holy angels to love their own glory more than God's. It is unfathomable. The Bible does not take us deep into the heart of such mysterious sin to explain the soul-dynamics that make rebellion rise out of righteousness. We are not given the final answer of how the origin of sin in the soul of a holy being takes

place. But neither are we left to wonder if God was surprised or if he had to revamp all his plans. We are taken by Scripture deep into the halls of eternity and given glimpses that are breathtaking. And God's aim in this is not to promote speculation, but to awaken worship and make us mighty for Christ in the midst of sin and misery.

As we come through Genesis 1–2 to Genesis 3, all is well, it seems. Genesis 1:31 says, “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” God did not create anything evil. It was all very good.

Then suddenly when chapter 3 opens, there is this serpent. And he is clearly evil. He is calling God's word into question. Verse 1: “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” He is devious and deceitful and destructive. God had said in Genesis 2:17, “The day that you eat of [this tree] you shall surely die.” But the serpent says in verse 4: “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

Therefore, Jesus says of him in John 8:44 that he is both a “liar” and a “murderer.” “He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

SATAN, THAT ANCIENT SERPENT

Who is this serpent? The fullest answer is given in Revelation 12:9: “The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.” So the serpent in the garden is *the devil* (which means *slanderer*), and *Satan* (which means *accuser*), and the deceiver of the whole world.

Jesus calls him “the evil one” (Matt. 13:19) and “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). The Pharisees call him

“Beelzebul, the prince of demons” (Matt. 12:24). Paul calls him “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4) and “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2).

That’s the one we meet in Genesis 3. He is already evil, already a deceiver, already a murderer when he appears in the garden of God. In Genesis 3:15, after the serpent lures Adam and Eve into sin, God pronounces judgment on the serpent: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

Notice that at first it looks like the warfare will be between two offsprings: “between your offspring and her offspring.” But in the next statement, something surprising is said: “He shall bruise your head.” Who is *he*? Answer: the woman’s offspring. Who is *your* (“he shall bruise *your* head”)? Answer: the serpent himself, *not* his offspring. That is significant.

THE CRUSHING OF SATAN AT THE CROSS

The day is coming, God says, when *you*, the serpent (not just your offspring), will be defeated and removed from the earth. The offspring of this woman will crush you. That’s why the Son of God became human. It was a human who would crush Satan—the seed of the woman.

Hebrews 2:14 describes the connection between the humanity of Jesus and the destruction of Satan. “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.” The decisive blow was struck by the perfect offspring of the woman, Jesus Christ, when he died on the cross. This is one of the reasons why the eternal Son of God had to become human—because it was the offspring of the woman who would crush Satan. “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). God intended for his Son to get the glory as the Victor over the serpent.

Colossians 2:14–15 describes what God did to the demons when his Son died on the cross: “The record of debt that stood against us . . . he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” When Christ died for our sins, Satan was disarmed and defeated. The one eternally destructive weapon that he had was stripped from his hand—namely, his accusation before God that we are guilty and should perish with him. When Christ died for us, that accusation was nullified.

All of us who entrust ourselves to Christ will never perish. No accusation will stand against us. Satan cannot separate you from the love of God in Christ (Rom. 8:37–39).

THE INSURRECTION OF SATAN

Now the question that cries out for an answer is: Where did Satan come from? And why does God tolerate his murderous activity? In Genesis 3, he just seems to appear. God created everything good, but something happened. The good creation was corrupted.

The books of Jude and 2 Peter in the New Testament give us clues as to what happened. Jude 6 says, “The angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.” And 2 Peter 2:4 says, “God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.”

This may not be a direct reference to the original fall of Satan and his rebellion. Some argue that it refers to the sins of angels (“sons of God”) in Genesis 6:1–4. But in any case it is the best pointer we have in the Bible to how Satan and his subordinates came to be what they are.¹

¹Thomas Schreiner, for example, thinks the main reference of 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 is to the sins of angels in Genesis 6:1–4 but says that the “prehistoric fall of angels” is “a legitimate deduction theologically.” *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, Vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 336.

It appears then that at first there was a host of holy angels. And some of them, including Satan, “sinned,” or as Jude 6 says, “did not stay within their own position of authority.” In other words, the sin was a kind of insurrection. A desire for more power and more authority than they were appointed to have *by* God and *under* God.

So Satan originates as a created angel who, with other angels, rebels against God. They reject him as their all-satisfying king and joy and set out on a course of self-exaltation and presumed self-determination. They do not want to be subordinate. They do not want to be sent by God to serve others (Heb. 1:14). They lose their reverence and admiration and satisfaction in God. Now they dream of having authority over themselves and exalting themselves above God.

THE ORIGIN OF SATAN’S SIN

But now we ask: Why? How could this happen? There is no easy answer. In fact, the ultimate biblical answer creates even more questions. So it seems that in this age, while we “know in part” (1 Cor. 13:12), not all our questions will be answered.

Some people find help in saying that the angels had “free will,” and therefore God, out of respect for this free will, could not exert decisive influence to hold their allegiance or keep them adoring him. But I don’t find that idea helpful. It simply doesn’t answer the question: Why would a perfectly holy angel in God’s infinitely beautiful presence use his free will to suddenly hate God?

This idea that God was unable to prevent the rebellion because of his respect for the innate self-determining wills of sinless angels is not a solution to the problem. It doesn’t account for why perfectly holy beings would use their wills to despise what they were adoring when created. And it doesn’t fit with what the rest of the Bible says about God’s rule over the devil. In this setting, the term *free will* is simply another way of naming the mystery. But it’s not the way the Bible deals with the situation.

My approach to answering the question of how to think about the origin of Satan's sin is to read the whole Bible with the question: How does God relate to Satan's will? Is God helpless before the will of evil powers? Is he respectful of the freedom of Satan's will so that he does not intrude on it and exert his sovereignty over it? Are there powers outside himself that limit his rule over them? Or is God presented throughout the Bible as having the right and the power to restrain Satan anytime he pleases? And if so, why doesn't he do it more often? In fact, why doesn't he just nullify him or destroy him entirely?

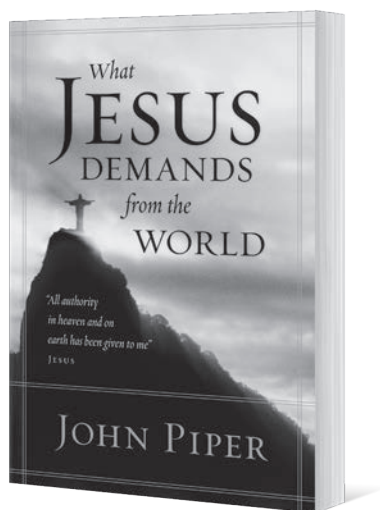
So when I read the Bible, here is what I find. Here are just a few glimpses of God's power over Satan. They point the way for how we should think about what measure of freedom Satan has.

GOD'S SOVEREIGN SWAY OVER SATAN

1. Though Satan is called "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31), Daniel 4:17 says, "The Most High [God] rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." And Psalm 33:10–11 says, "The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations." Yes, Satan is "the ruler of this world" in a subordinate sense. God has given him astonishing latitude to work his sin and misery in the world. He is a great ruler over the world, but not the *ultimate* one. God holds the decisive sway.

2. Though unclean spirits are everywhere doing deceptive and murderous things, Jesus Christ has all authority over them. Mark 1:27 says, "He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." When Christ commands the devil, the devil obeys. This raises the question about the difference between the command of God, say in the Ten Commandments, and the command of Christ in telling demons to depart or telling the universe to come into being. Clearly, God does exert his authority in giving

Knowing God's Love through Jesus's Demands in the Gospels



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DARRIN PATRICK, *Lead Pastor, The Journey, St. Louis*

JOHN PIPER (DTheol, University of Munich) is the founder and teacher of desiringGod.org and chancellor of Bethlehem College and Seminary. He served for 33 years as pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis and is author of more than 50 books, including *Desiring God*, *Don't Waste Your Life*, *This Momentary Marriage*, and *Bloodlines*.

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