

*Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions.* John Piper. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004.

### About the Author and this Book

Piper was born in Tennessee in 1946 and is the senior pastor of Bethlehem (Reformed) Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His father was an itinerant evangelist. He has a doctorate in New Testament Studies from the University of Munich, Germany with his dissertation entitled *Love Your Enemies*.

John Piper is a prolific author and I have appreciated other books he has written, especially *Desiring God*. I am currently reading *What Jesus Demands from the World* with my 19-year old daughter. Every now and then we sit down and read one of these short chapters (demands) together. *Let the Nations Be Glad!* is certainly a book I'd recommend, though I did find it somewhat repetitive. Also, Piper's stress on *Glorify God and Enjoy Him Forever*, with the accent on "enjoy", has got me wondering a bit.

It's worth comparing this with how Jesus defines the chief end of people, namely as being to love God with everything we've got. And yet.... It is noteworthy, that Jesus refuses to isolate this demand, but immediately links it with the second command, to love our neighbour as oneself. Indeed, while Jesus speaks of all that God expects from us (according to the Law and Prophets) hanging on these two commands, he also, using the form of the Golden Rule, indicates that the second command "sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Mt 7:12). Significantly, Paul speaks of all that the Law expects from us being fulfilled in this second command (Rom 13:8-10).

I recognize that in *Let the Nations Be Glad!* an attempt is made to show that exercising compassion for the lost is part and parcel of glorifying God and enjoying him, but I am still pondering whether Piper is making a sufficient attempt to do justice to the second command in his understanding of our chief end.

### Preface

The standout here is Piper's citation of Stott's great statement: "Only one imperialism is Christian... and that is concern for His Imperial Majesty Jesus Christ, and for the glory of his empire" (9).

### Part 1. Making God Supreme in Missions. The Purpose, the Power, and the Price Chapter 1. *The Supremacy of God in Missions through Worship*

Piper begins by stressing that worship, not mission, is the ultimate goal of the church. As he explains,

Mission exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not mission, because God is ultimate, not man.... [Mission] is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever (17).

Consequently, worship "is the fuel and goal of missions... Missions begins and ends in worship" (17). It also follows: "Where passion for God is weak, zeal for missions will be weak" (18).

According to Missner, Einstein's disinterest in organized religion stemmed from his awareness of the disparity between his knowledge of the immensity of the universe and the lack of awe manifested by preachers who spoke about God.

Piper finds the “deepest reason why our passion for God should fuel missions is that God’s passion for God fuels missions. Missions is the overflow of our delight in God because missions is the overflow of God’s delight in being God” (21). The answer to the question “What is the chief end of man?” is “to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” Ah, but “What is the chief end of God?” Answer: “The chief end of God is to glorify God and enjoy himself forever” (21).

Piper seeks to answer the objection that this implies God is unloving, given that 1 Corinthians 13:5 states, “Love...does not seek its own.” He shows:

1. That Paul “did not mean that seeking your own happiness in loving others is loveless” (29), since verse 3 implies that one must love in order to reap true gain: “He is calling for the radical transformation of heart that finds its joy in the act of love and all the goodness that comes from it” (30).
2. The basic principle is not, “Don’t exalt your own glory”, but “Exalt the glory of what is infinitely glorious”, which for both us and God is God. It is right for God to do some things that are forbidden for us, including seeking his own glory.
3. Since “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him”, attaining optimal joy, it therefore follows that it is indeed loving for God to exalt his own glory. Here Piper supplies an excellent illustration. A patient he visits encourages him by telling how good of him it was to come. If he responds by saying it was only his duty to come then he fails to honour the patient, because “delight confers more honour than duty dues” (32).
4. “The glory God seeks to magnify is supremely the glory of his mercy” (33). Here Piper makes much of Romans 15:8-9 observing:
  - a. Zeal for the glory of God motivates world missions: “Christ was on a mission to magnify God” (33).
  - b. A servant spirit and a heart of mercy motivate world missions.
  - c. These two truths are one truth: “the glory we want to see exalted among the nations is supremely the glory of God’s mercy” (34). Piper augments this, using Ephesians 1:5-6, 11-12, 14, emphasizing the phrases “to the praise of His glory” and “the glory of His grace”. Piper concludes that “the more passionate God is for his glory, the more passionate he is for meeting our need as sinners” (35).

This is very helpful, though Piper’s case would be strengthened greatly by an unpacking of the doctrine of the Trinity that explains the intimacy and love of each member of the Trinity for the other members and the way this expresses itself in the commitment of the Father to glorify the Son and the Son the Father. See especially John 17.

God’s exaltation of himself to show mercy also implies that “God is glorious because he does not need the nations to work for him. He is free to work for them” (36). Consequently, “Missions is not a recruitment project for God’s labor force. It is a liberation project from the heavy burdens and hard yokes of other gods (Matt. 11:28-30)” (36).

Commenting on Isaiah’s exposition of God’s uniqueness Piper observes,  
 The difference between the true God and the gods of the nations is that the true God carries and the other gods must be carried. God serves; they must be served. God glorifies his might by showing mercy. They glorify theirs by gathering slaves (37).

Citing texts from the Psalms that exhort the nations to rejoice and be glad in God, Piper also points out that gospel message actually calls on all people to seek their own best interest:

His first and great requirement of all men everywhere is that they repent from seeking their joy in other things and begin to seek it only in him... The great sin of the world is not that the human race has failed to work for God so as to increase his glory but that we have failed to delight in God so as to reflect his glory, for God's glory is most reflected in us when we are delighted in him (37).

Piper cites a number of New Testament texts that God-centered missions exist for the sake of the name of Jesus and uses David Brainerd, the missionary to the Indians in New Jersey in the 1740s, as a great exemplar of passion for the glory of God. He goes on to stress that "compassion for people must not be detached from passion for the glory of God" (41), also commending John Dawson's comments that "[it] is not primarily out of a compassion for humanity that we share our faith or pray for the lost; it is first of all, love for God" (42). However, recognizing that God sometimes gives Christians "a supernatural burden of love for distant peoples", Piper emphasises that "the motive of compassion and the motive of zeal for the glory of God are not separate" (42).

Among Piper's concluding and summarizing remarks for this chapter I was particularly struck by his comment, "There will be no big world vision without a big God" (43).

#### *Chapter 2. The Supremacy of God in Missions through Prayer*

This chapter stresses over and over again a simple truth: "We cannot know what prayer is for until we know that life is war" (45). Piper likes to think of prayer as "primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the church as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief", not as "a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den" (45).

Piper comments on many New Testament texts that emphasise life is war, insisting: "There is not a warfare part or life and a non-warfare part. Life is war" (47).

He observes that most people show by their priorities that they don't really believe this, acting as though they were in peacetime not wartime. Certainly very few think that this spiritual warfare is greater than World War II or any imaginable nuclear war, even though the casualties of this war enter a hell of everlasting torment. Indeed, as C.S. Lewis recognized in *Screwtape Letters*, terrible human wars may awaken people "to the more serious war that rages daily for the soul" (48).

On the basis of John 15:16 Piper observes, "Prayer is designed to extend the kingdom into fruitless enemy territory" (49). He also points out that the "battlefield image of prayer" is not undermined by 1 Timothy 2:1-4. Rather, this text teaches that prayer for a peaceful life is "a strategic appeal to headquarters to ask that the enemy not be allowed to draw any firepower away to decoy conflicts of flesh and blood" (50), given that the real war is the one that would deny people salvation and coming to the knowledge of the truth.

Because churches are characterized by a peacetime mentality there is a lack of willingness to suffer, to take risks, to launch out on God alone. Indeed, drawing on Mark 4:18-19, Piper describes us as a "third soil century" (51).

Piper goes on to illustrate from the lives of Puritans the essential need for prayers and the mission of the church to be an expression of confidence in the sovereignty of God and the triumph of his cause. Between 1627-1640 the 15,000 (mainly) Puritan migrants from England to America “saw their emigration as part of God’s missionary strategy to extend his kingdom among the nations” (53). John Eliot’s commitment to reaching Indians is representative of this. By the time he was 84 there were numerous Indian churches, some with their own Indian pastors. Eliot once said, “Prayers and pains through faith in Christ Jesus will do any thing!”

Piper also points out that William Carey was nourished in the Puritan tradition, as were David Brainerd and Adoniram Judson, Alexander Duff and David Livingstone, John Paton and a host of others who gave their lives to reach the unreached peoples of the world. The modern missionary movement did not arise in a theological vacuum. It grew out of a great Reformation tradition that put the sovereignty of God square in the center of human life. In the warfare of world missions, God bares his arm and triumphs for his own glory. (54)

With respect to the fundamental importance of a conviction in God’s absolute sovereignty Piper counters the view that the doctrine of election makes missions unnecessary. He cites from John Alexander, a former president of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship:

At the beginning of my missionary career I said that if predestination were true I could not be a missionary. Now after twenty some years of struggling with the hardness of the human heart, I say I could never be a missionary unless I believed in the doctrine of predestination. (55)

Piper continues by citing examples from Scripture illustrating the supremacy of God in the mission of the church. Prayer has a crucial place in the mission of the church because it makes “clear to all the participants in this war that the victory belongs to the Lord” (57). Having cited verse after verse to underscore the crucial place of prayer, Piper cautions against overstating the role of prayer:

Prayer is the power that wields the weapon of the Word, and the Word is the weapon by which the nations will be brought to faith and obedience. (63)

After emphasizing the central role of the Word Piper comments,

Not only has God made the accomplishment of his purposes hang on the preaching of the Word, but he has also made the success of that preaching hang on prayer. (66)

Piper closes the chapter by providing wonderful examples of the power of persistent, persevering prayer.

### *Chapter 3. The Supremacy of God in Missions through Suffering*

Piper begins by recounting the story of Henry Martyn, then drawing attention to Mark 8:34, Jesus’ demand that the one who follows him, “take up his cross.” Piper explains that this effectively means, “Pick up your electric chair and follow me to the execution room” or “Pick up this sword and carry it to the place of beheading” or “Take up this rope and carry it to the gallows” (74).

Piper discriminates between Christian martyrs and so-called “martyrs” through terrorist acts:

1. The life of a Christian martyr is taken by those he wants to save.

## 2. Christian martyrs do not pursue death, they pursue love.

He notes David Barrett's estimate that in 2002 about 164,000 Christians would die as martyrs and that by the year 2025 this figure would grow to around 210,000. Barrett has also calculated that there were over 45 million Christian martyrs in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Piper points out that the New Testament language of being crucified with Christ and dying with him does not mean that spiritual death replaces "a real, practical application of Jesus' teaching to physical suffering and death but that it makes that application possible", so that "crucified" Christians are "able to take risks, and suffer the pain, and even die without despair but full of hope" (76).

It is a mistake to say that "since Christ died for me, I don't need to die for others. Since he suffered for me, I don't need to suffer for others" (76). Piper appeals to 1 Peter 2:20-21 in support, noting that all Christians are called to suffer (1 Pet 4:1, 12; 5:9). He also cites from Richard Wurmbrand, who endured fourteen years of imprisonment and torture in Romania between 1948 and 1964: "Nobody resists who has not renounced the pleasures of life beforehand" (79). Piper quotes other Scriptures which teach Christians to regard suffering as normative.

Piper notes how Charles Wesley, heedless of the danger to his own life, spent a night locked in with condemned prisoners, communicating the gospel to them and leading all of them to Christ before they were executed the next day. All die in hope so that Wesley said, "That hour under the gallows was the most blessed hour of my life" (82).

Piper also points out that terrible sufferings endured by Paul in prosecuting his ministry, graphically describing what Paul's back must have looked like after having received "forty lashes less one" on no less than five occasions. Yet Paul described such suffering as a gift of God (Phil 1:29).

Piper identifies six reasons why God has willed that the mission of the church should advance through storm and suffering:

1. *Suffering deepens faith and holiness.* So John Paton, Scottish missionary to the New Hebrides (now Vanuatu), after spending a night in a tree hiding from vicious natives intent on killing him, said,
 

The hours I spent there live all before me as if it were but of yesterday. I heard the frequent discharging of muskets, and the yells of the Savages. Yet I sat there among the branches, as safe in the arms of Jesus. Never, in all my sorrows, did my Lord draw nearer to me, and speak more soothingly to my soul, than when the moonlight flickered among these chestnut leaves, and the night air played on my throbbing brow, as I told all my heart to Jesus. Alone, yet not alone! If it be to glorify my God, I will not grudge to spend many nights alone in such a tree, to feel again my Savior's spiritual presence, to enjoy His consoling fellowship. If thus thrown back upon your own soul, alone, all alone, in the midnight, in the bush, in the very embrace of death itself, have you a Friend that will not fail you then? (87)
2. *Suffering makes your cup increase.* The reward of our experience of God's glory in heaven increases (2 Cor 4:17-18; Mt 5:11-12). He notes here Jonathan Edwards' explanation of the different degrees of happiness and glory in heaven.

3. *Suffering is the price of making others bold.* Examples provided are Paul's imprisonment (Phil 1:14), David Brainerd's suffering and dedication, the martyrdoms of the five missionaries at the hands of the Huaoranis (Aucas) and the strength of their widows, and the doubling of applications for overseas service with Wycliffe Bible Translators following the execution of Wycliffe missionary, Chet Bitterman by a Colombian guerrilla group in 1981.
4. *Suffering fills up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.* Paul's sufferings were used by God to bring salvation to people (1 Thess 1:5-6; 2 Cor 1:5-6; Col 1:24). Piper repeats Michael Card's story of the Masai warrior who after becoming a Christian kept going back to his own village to share the gospel with them even though each time he was severely beaten and nearly died. The result was that the entire village turned to Christ.
5. *Suffering enforces the missionary command to go.* The persecution arising after Stephen's martyrdom brought into effect Acts 1:8 (Acts 11:19). Piper notes studies showing "that the richer we are the smaller the percentage of our income we give to the church and its mission. The poorest fifth of the church gives 3.4 percent of its income to the church and the richest fifth gives 1.6 percent - half as much as the poorer church members" (95). While persecution can have harmful effects on the church, prosperity is "even more devastating to the mission God calls us to" (95). In the 1930s thousands of Koreans fled N. Korea when the Japanese invaded. Stalin, viewing them as a security risk, relocated them in various parts of the Soviet Union, including Tashkent, where following a revival among these Koreans many Muslim, Uzbek and Kazak friends were also brought to Christ. Piper also tells the story of a man falsely imprisoned in a Latin American prison who led 30 prisoners to Christ. Then there's the story of the police chief who wrongly imprisoned evangelist Martinho Campos in Mozambique. One night he was forced to swerve the truck he was driving when he saw "what appeared to be a man in gleaming white, standing in the road, facing him" (97). He was trapped when the truck was overturned, but rescued by the prisoners he had been conveying in the truck. Subsequently, he asked Martinho for forgiveness and granted him official permission to travel and evangelize throughout the whole area under his jurisdiction. Similarly, Pastor Hristo Kulichev, imprisoned in Bulgaria in 1985 for preaching in his church, discovered he had a much more fruitful ministry in prison than he could have expected in church.
6. *The Supremacy of Christ is Manifest in Suffering.* "[The] supremacy of God is the reason for suffering running through and above all the other reasons. God ordains suffering because through all the other reasons it displays to the world the supremacy of his worth above all treasures" (99). Here Piper draws attention to texts which highlight Christians rejoicing in their sufferings as "the display of God's superiority over all that the world has to offer" (100). While it is good to receive God's good gifts with thanksgiving (1 Tim 4:3), Christians need to also count all but loss for the sake of Christ (Phil 3:7-8). He astutely points out: "You cannot show the preciousness of a person by being happy with his gifts. Ingratitude will certainly prove that the giver is not loved, but gratitude for gifts does not prove that the giver is precious. What proves that the giver is precious is the glad-hearted readiness to leave all his gifts to be with him. This is why suffering is so central in the mission of the church" (101). Unbelievers need to see that our hope is not rooted in what this world has to offer but in God.

Piper comments, "Jesus presses us toward a wartime lifestyle that does not value simplicity for simplicity's sake but values wartime austerity for what it can produce for the cause of world evangelization" (102). He warns against accompanying an \$80,000 or \$180,000 salary with a \$80,000 or \$180,000 lifestyle: "God is calling us to be conduits of his grace, not cul-de-sacs. Our great danger today is thinking that the conduit should be lined with gold. It shouldn't. Copper will do" (102).

Piper adds to his warnings against the desire for riches a caution against developing a retirement mentality, using Charles Simeon and Raymond Lull as motivational examples. John G. Paton responded to an aging Christian who tried to dissuade him from going as a missionary to the South Sea Islands with the words, "You'll be eaten by Cannibals!" Paton replied,

Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by Cannibals or worms; and in the Great Day my resurrection body will arise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer" (106-107).

## Part 2. Making God Supreme in Missions. The Necessity and Nature of the Task

### *Chapter 4. The Supremacy of Christ as the Conscious Focus of All Saving Faith*

#### Will Anyone Experience Eternal Conscious Torment Under God's Wrath?

Here Piper exposes the error of those who deny that there is eternal punishment for not believing in Christ (e.g. George MacDonald, Clark Pinnock, John Stott, Edward Fudge). Demonstrating this from Scripture is relatively straightforward and Piper deals with the pertinent texts on pages 116-122. He comments, "The biblical assumption of the justice of hell is the clearest testimony to the infiniteness of the sin of failing to glorify God" (120-121).

#### Is the Work of Christ Necessary?

Piper deals with this question on pages 122-125, showing how clear the Scriptures are in establishing that Christ's atoning death is "the one and only way for anyone to get right with God" (125).

#### Is it Necessary for People to Hear of Christ in order to be Eternally Saved?

Piper uses the clear teaching of Scripture to answer this question in the affirmative on pages 125-154. In the course of this argumentation he points out, emphasizing the word "in", that Acts 10:35 does not mean "that all people are acceptable as candidates for salvation, no matter their ethnic background" (137). He proposes that

Cornelius represents a kind of unsaved person among an unreached people group who is seeking God in an extraordinary way. Peter is saying that God *accepts* this search as genuine (hence 'acceptable' in verse 35) and works wonders to bring that person the gospel of Jesus Christ the way he did through the visions of both Peter on the housetop and Cornelius in the hour of prayer (138).

Again:

Cornelius does not represent persons who are saved without hearing and believing the gospel; rather, he illustrates God's intention to take out a people for his name from 'every nation' (Acts 10:35) through the sending of gospel messengers across cultural lines, which had once been taboo (139).

...The point is *not* that Gentiles are already part of God's chosen people because they fear God and do many good deeds. The key sentence is Acts 11:14: "He will declare to you a *message by which you will be saved*" (140).

He also deals with the view that the citation of Psalm 19:4 in Romans 10:18 "teaches that general revelation in nature is all that some need to receive salvation, apart from missionary proclamation" (so e.g. Millard Erickson, 145). Rather, "Paul uses the words of the psalm to draw a parallel between the universality of general revelation and this universal spread of the gospel" (146).

Piper also demonstrates that it is futile to argue that motivation to evangelise the lost is enhanced by the view that people can be saved even though they have no access to the gospel.

Piper affirms:

that the contemporary abandonment of the universal necessity of hearing the gospel for salvation does indeed cut a nerve in missionary motivation. I say a nerve rather than the nerve because I agree that the universal lostness is not the only focus for missionary motivation. Arching over it is the great goal of bringing glory to Christ (154).

#### *Chapter 5. The Supremacy of God among "All the Nations"*

Two ocean liners begin to sink at the same time. There are not enough lifeboats. You arrive where people from the first ship are already drowning. Hundreds of metres away the same thing is happening with respect to the second ship. You are saving as many as you can and there is still room in your boat when you hear a cry from the other ship, "Come over and help us." Love would have no reason to place a higher value on more distant lives than the nearer ones.

Piper's point is this: "Love alone (from our limited human perspective) may not see the missionary task the way God does" (156).

Piper observes that since 1974 the evangelization of unreached peoples has replaced a prior focus on evangelizing unreached territories. Ralph Winter had exposed the reality of "people blindness", a "blindness to the existence of separate *peoples* within *countries*" (158). Consequently, while every country had been penetrated with the gospel some four out of five non-Christians were still cut off from the gospel "because the barriers are cultural and linguistic, not geographic" (158).

Piper notes how the Lausanne Strategy Working Group defined a "people group" as:

A significantly large grouping of individuals who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of their shared language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc. or combinations of these... [It is] the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance (158).

Piper tests the people-group focus by the Scriptures asking whether the missionary mandate of the Bible is:

1. A command to reach as many individuals as possible, or
2. A command to reach all the 'fields', or
3. A command to reach all the 'people groups' of the world, as the Bible defines people groups (that is, not in a precise sociological way that includes

individuals grouped on the basis of things such as occupation, residence or handicaps).

After establishing the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 was not merely given to the apostles but also the church Piper proceeds to examine the phrase *panta ta ethnē* ("all nations"). He summarises his findings (187):

1. In the New Testament, the singular *ethnos* never refers to a Gentile individual but always people group or nation.
2. The plural *ethnē* can mean either Gentile individuals or people groups.
3. The eighteen New Testament uses of *panta ta ethnē* only once means Gentile individuals; nine times people groups and the other references are ambiguous.
4. Virtually all of the almost 100 uses of *panta ta ethnē* in the Greek Old Testament refer to nations in distinction from the nation of Israel.
5. New Testament adoption of the Abrahamic promises - "all the families of the earth" would be blessed and Abraham would be "the father of many nations" - gives the mission of the church a people-group focus.
6. The Old Testament is concerned for God's glory to be declared and his salvation known by all peoples/nations.
7. Paul, grounding his missiology in the Old Testament, was committed to reaching more people groups, not simply more individuals.
8. The apostle John saw missions as gathering in "the children of God" or "other sheep" out of "every tribe, tongue, people and nation".
9. The use of *panta ta ethnē* in Luke's version of Jesus' missionary commission (24:46-47) presupposes an Old Testament background indicating all peoples or nations are intended.
10. In Mark 11:17 Jesus evidently sees God's global purpose in terms of people groups.

Piper argues that since "God probably did not intend for us to use a precise definition of people groups" (188), it follows that the point of Matthew 24:14 is that we should always think in terms of needing to reach more people groups until Jesus returns.

Piper finds it helpful in thinking about people groups to be reached to identify ethnolinguistic peoples, estimated at 12,600 by David Barrett in 2001. Further the flexibility of *ethnē* indicates that it may serve as "an inclusive designation for groups of various sizes" (191).

With some support from Romans 15:23 (cf. v19) it is reasonable to speak of a people group being "reached" when "mission efforts have established an indigenous church that has the strength and resources to evangelize the rest of the group" (192). He also accepts that the Bible provides for flexibility in understanding when a group is "reached", given that there is no mention of response in texts like Mark 16:15 and Matthew 24:14. Consequently, in a limited sense, "a people group is reached if the message is proclaimed in it as an understandable testimony" (193). By contrast, Matthew 28:19 includes a response, pointing to a mission mandate that includes making converts, not merely proclamation. Piper also notes that a *biblical* understanding of people groups may well involve groups that are so small and so closely related to another group that planting an evangelistically effective indigenous church in it may not be necessary. Consequently, "there will always be some ambiguity in the definition of 'reached'" (194).

Piper proceeds to discriminate between the unique Paul-type mission of doing frontier missionary work among unreached people groups and Timothy-type ministries, continuing what the Paul-type mission begins. He asks what persons or agencies in the various churches and denominations will pick up the Paul-type mission.

Piper reiterates that "the goal of missions is the glory of God" (196), noting Romans 1:5 ("for the sake of his name"), 15:9 ("might glorify God") and drawing attention to Revelation 5:9 and Psalm 96:3.

He points out, appealing to Acts 17:26 and Revelation 21:3, "that the diversity of the nations has its creation and consummation in the will of God. Its origin was neither accidental nor evil. And its future is eternal: The diversity will never be replaced by uniformity" (197). In this connection Piper has a helpful comment on the Tower of Babel episode (Gen 11), which might easily be misunderstood as implying that God disapproves of linguistic diversity:

...the diversity of languages is reported in Genesis 10:5, 20, 31 before the tower of Babel is mentioned in Genesis 11. What we learn is that God's plan of a common origin for all peoples on the one hand and his plan for diversified languages on the other hand restrains the pride of man on two sides: Diversity restrains the temptation to unite against God (as at Babel), and unified origin restrains the temptation to boast in ethnic uniqueness... The miracle and the blessing of 'tongues' at Pentecost was not a declaration that in the age of promise the languages of the world would disappear but rather a declaration that in the age of promise every obstacle to humble, God-glorifying unity in faith would be overcome (197).

Piper locates four answers to the question *How does God's focus on the diversity of the peoples advance his purpose to be glorified in his creation?*

1. There "is a beauty and power of praise that comes from unity in diversity that is greater than that which comes from unity alone" (198).
2. The "fame and greatness and worth of an object of beauty increases in proportion to the diversity of those who recognize its beauty" (199).
3. The "strength and wisdom and love of a leader is magnified in proportion to the diversity of people he can inspire to follow him with joy" (199).
4. "By focusing on all the people groups of the world, God undercuts ethnocentric pride and throws all peoples back upon his free grace rather than any distinctive of their own" (200).

### **Part 3. Making God Supreme in Missions. The Practical Outworking of Compassion in Worship**

*Chapter 6. A Passion for God's Supremacy and Compassion for Man's Soul. Jonathan Edwards on the Unity of Motives for World Missions*

Piper's convictions concerning the relationship of worship and mission owe their greatest debt to Jonathan Edwards. Edwards wrote a book entitled *The End for Which God Created the World*, explaining that the ultimate end of God's works is the glory of God.

Piper reiterates what he has stressed already in this book that worship, not mission, is the ultimate end of the church and refers to many biblical texts to demonstrate this. He defines the aim of missions as ensuring there is "a church who worships God

through Jesus Christ in all the peoples and tribes and languages and ethnic groups of the world" (207).

This chapter largely addresses the question: How does the motive of compassion for people relate to this primary motive of a passion for the glory of God? Piper wants to stress that missions is driven "by a passion not only to restore the glory of God to its rightful place in the worshipping soul but also to rescue sinners from everlasting pain" (209), the reality of eternal torment in hell preached powerfully by Jonathan Edwards in his famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God".

Piper recognizes that motives to exalt God and to love people do not always feel emotionally compatible. Piper answers this in five steps:

1. Compassion pursues the rescue of perishing sinners.
2. Fear of hell by itself saves nobody: "you can scare people toward heaven, but you can't scare anybody into heaven" (211). What people need is a thirst for Christ himself not for what we can get out of him.
3. Therefore, compassion must not merely warn people about the pains of going to hell but must also lure people to the pleasures of knowing Christ.
4. The key from Jonathan Edwards: It is precisely this satisfaction in Christ himself that magnifies Christ and glorifies God. Edwards states, "God is glorified not only by His glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in" (212).
5. The aim of compassion to rescue sinners from everlasting pain and the aim of passion to see God honoured are not in conflict.

#### *Chapter 7. The Inner Simplicity and Outer Freedom of Worldwide Worship*

This final chapter aims to clarify what is meant by "worship". Here Piper argues "that worship in the New Testament moved toward something radically simple and inward, with manifold external expressions in life and liturgy" (215). Indeed, "we find in the New Testament... a stunning degree of indifference to worship as an outward form and an utterly radical intensification of worship as an inward experience of the heart" (216-216).

He observes that the New Testament epistles contain very little instruction dealing explicitly with corporate worship, so-called "worship services". In the Old Testament the most common word for worship, *hishtahavah* and related forms, basically means "bow down", connoting reverence, respect and honour. In the LXX 164 of the 171 occurrences of this word are rendered by the Greek *proskyneō*, the main word for worship in the New Testament. It is common enough in the Gospels, describing people bowing down before Jesus, and also in Revelation, describing angels and elders in heaven bowing down before God. But in Paul's epistles it is only used once to describe an unbeliever bowing down when the power of prophecy causes him to sense and confess that God is in the assembly (1 Cor 14:25). Further, this word is absent from the letters of Peter, James and John.

The reason for the absence of this word from the New Testament epistles consists in the way Jesus treated worship in his life and teaching, especially John 4:20-24. When Jesus drove out the moneychangers from the temple he uttered words - "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Mk 11:17) - which focus "attention away from the outward acts of Jewish sacrifices to the personal act of communion with God for all peoples." Indeed, Jesus himself is the new temple, this diverting

“attention away from worship as a localized activity with outward forms and [pointing] toward a personal, spiritual experience with himself at the center. Worship does not have to have a building, a priesthood, and a sacrificial system. It has to have the risen Jesus” (217).

In John 4:20-24 Jesus transforms *proskyneō* “into a concept that is mainly inward rather than outward and mainly pervasive rather than localized” (217). Piper further comments:

I take “in spirit” to mean that this true worship is carried along by the Holy Spirit and is happening mainly as an inward, spiritual event, not mainly as an outward, bodily event. And I take “in truth” to mean that this true worship is a response to true views of God and is shaped and guided by true views of God (219).

Consequently, the New Testament epistles effectively boycott the use of *proskyneō* because it “did not make clear enough the inward, spiritual nature of true worship” (219). Whereas in the Gospels and in Revelation, bowing down is before the visible Christ or God in the epistles Jesus is not present in visible glory.

In the LXX the second-most frequently used word for worship is *latreuō*, “serve” (e.g. Ex 23:24). Paul uses this to indicate that virtually all of life is worship when lived in the right spirit (Rom 1:9; Phil 3:3; Rom 12:1). Also the use of Old Testament language for temple sacrifices and priestly service involves the de-institutionalising, de-localising and de-externalising of worship (see Heb 13:15, 16; Rom 15:16; Phil 2:17: 4:18; 2 Tim 4:6; 1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17; Eph 5:18-20). The freedom of worship from form and place was insisted on by Calvin and Luther. Indeed, the Puritans called their churches “meeting places” for this very reason.

Consistent with what Piper has been emphasizing throughout the book, he defines the essence of worship as “being satisfied with God”. This is rooted in “God’s own infinite exuberance for God”, his “jealousy that his own satisfaction in his own glory be known and shared by his people” (223).

C.S. Lewis explains why it is profoundly loving of God to command us to glorify him:

I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise... The world rings with praise - lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favourite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favourite game - praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians and scholars... My whole, more general difficulty about praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us, as regards the supremely Valuable, what we delight to do, what indeed we can’t help doing, about everything else we value.

I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation. It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are, the delight is incomplete till it is expressed (224).

So Piper concludes that “genuine, heartfelt praise is not artificially tacked on to joy. It is the consummation of joy. Joy in some beauty or some value is not complete until it is expressed in a kind of praise” (225). It follows that our joy is itself a tribute to God (Phil 1:20-21, 23).

Four implications follow from all this:

1. *The pursuit of joy in God is not optional. It is our highest duty.*

Piper observes:

Millions of Christians have absorbed a popular ethic that comes more from Immanuel Kant than from the Bible. Their assumption is that it is morally defective to seek happiness - to pursue joy, to crave satisfaction, and to devote ourselves to seeking it (227).

Things are not helped by pastors who complain about church members not coming to church to *give* but to *get*. Piper contends this is precisely why they ought to come.

2. *Worship becomes radically God-centered.*

3. *The primacy of worship is protected when we see it is an end in itself.*

We do **not** "worship" to raise money, attract crowds, heal human hurts, recruit workers, improve church morale, help talented musicians fulfil their calling, teach out children the way of righteousness, help marriages stay together, evangelise the lost, motivate people for service projects, or to give a family feeling, etc.

4. *All of life is an expression of worship.*

#### *Conclusion*

Worship: "The goal of missions...is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God" (231), with worship being the fuel and the goal of missions.

Prayer: Its purpose "is to make clear to all participants in missions that the victory belongs to the Lord." It "is God's appointed means of bringing grace to the world and glory to himself... In prayer, he is glorified and we are satisfied" (232).

Suffering: "The extent of our *sacrifice* coupled with the depth of our *joy* displays the worth we put on the reward of God" (232).

Is Knowing Christ Crucial?: "The supremacy of God in missions is affirmed biblically by affirming the supremacy of his Son as the focus of all saving faith" (233).

People or Peoples?: "God's call for missions in Scripture cannot be defined merely in terms of crossing cultures to maximize the total number of individuals saved. Rather, God's will for missions is that every people group be reached with the testimony of Christ and that a people be called out for his name from among all the nations" (234).

Afterword. *The Supremacy of God in Going and Sending* by Tom Steller

"There are only two ways for us to respond to [this] truth...about the supremacy of God in missions. We must either go out for the sake of his name, or we must send and support such people who do, and do so in a manner worthy of God" (235; 3 Jn 1-8).

Note:

1. "The name of God is at stake in how we treat our missionaries... God is not glorified when our missionaries are simply a name on the back of the church bulletin or a line item in the budget... There is a world of difference between a church 'having' a missionary and a church 'sending' a missionary" (236-237; "in a manner worthy of the Lord").

2. "But just as there is a God-centeredness to sending, there is also a God-centeredness to going" (237; going out "for the sake of the name").

Following David Bryant's use of "world Christian" Steller comments:

Not every Christian is called to be a missionary, but every follower of Christ is called to be a world Christian. A world Christian is someone who is so gripped by the glory of God and the glory of his global purpose that he chooses to align himself with God's mission to fill the earth with the knowledge of his glory as the waters cover the sea (Hab 2:14) [238].