

“Many would have us believe that life is hopelessly fragmented and truth an elusive dream. The authors of this book beg to differ and enthusiastically point us to the cohesive centrality and absolute supremacy of Jesus Christ. Having heard these messages live at the 2006 Desiring God National Conference, I’m thrilled to see them now in print. Highly recommended!”

—SAM STORMS, founder, Enjoying God Ministries

“Over the past decade evangelicals have been divided over how to respond to the challenges of postmodernism. The options—which have ranged from naïve denial to unquestioned embrace—tend to suffer from the same fatal flaw: putting the emphasis on culture rather than on Christ. This collection corrects that error by providing a fresh perspective that is pastorally sensitive and biblically sound. A timely, well-reasoned book that should be enthusiastically welcomed by the evangelical community.”

—JOE CARTER, blogger([www.evangelicaloutpost.com](http://www.evangelicaloutpost.com));  
director of communications, Family Research Council

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# The Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World

John Piper | Justin Taylor

GENERAL EDITORS

CROSSWAY BOOKS  
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

*The Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World*

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Published by Crossway Books

a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers  
1300 Crescent Street  
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

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Cover photo: iStock

First printing 2007

Printed in the United States of America

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**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

The Supremacy of Christ in a postmodern world / John Piper and Justin Taylor, editors.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-58134-922-1 (tpb)

1. Apologetics. 2. Jesus Christ—Person and offices. 3. Postmodernism—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Piper, John, 1946–. II. Taylor, Justin, 1976–. III. Title.

BT1103.S87 2007

230—dc22

2007024825

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BP 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07  
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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# Introduction

JUSTIN TAYLOR

The chapters in this volume grow out of a conference convened in Minneapolis in the fall of 2006 to explore the supremacy of Christ in a postmodern world. The speakers at that conference—and now the contributors to this volume—were David Wells, Voddie Baucham Jr., John Piper, D. A. Carson, Tim Keller, and Mark Driscoll. Whether addressing culture, truth, joy, love, the gospel, or the church, each seeks to sharpen our thinking and motivate our ministry by considering how each of these intersects with the truth of Christ in our contemporary world.

What follows is a brief overview of each chapter.

## **Culture and Truth**

David Wells observes that two realities are currently transforming culture: the emergence of the postmodern ethos and the tidal wave of ethnic and religious diversity in the West. These two motifs are changing the cultural context within which the church is to live, move, and have its being. Theology, if true to its nature, must be missional, and, therefore, we must seek to understand both Christ and culture, both the Word and the world. Wells goes on to explore two ways in which postmodern belief is expressing itself in this cultural context: through a form of spirituality that distinguishes itself from being religious and through the language of meaninglessness, whereby reality is collapsed into the self. Wells then addresses how the supremacy of Christ and biblical reality speak into both situations.

Voddie Baucham Jr. addresses life's ultimate questions from the perspective of two broad worldviews: Christian theism and a postmodern version of secular humanism. He first gives a cursory overview of these systems by means of five major categories: (1) God; (2) man; (3) truth; (4) knowledge; and (5) ethics. He then explores how these com-

peting perspectives work in terms of life's ultimate questions: (1) Who am I? (2) Why am I here? (3) What is wrong with the world? and (4) How can what is wrong be made right? Using Colossians 1:12–21 as a framework, he shows the supremacy of Christ in truth over against a dying, decaying, and hurting postmodern world.

### **Joy and Love**

John Piper's chapter is built on John 17:13—"But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves." Piper suggests that the deepest source of this joy is Jesus' seeing and sharing the Father's glory, and that this joy is conveyed to us through propositions. Piper's arguments proceed logically through ten steps: (1) God is the only eternal being; therefore everything and everyone else is dependent on, and less valuable than, him. (2) God has been eternally and supremely joyful in the fellowship of the Trinity, so he has no deficiency that would prompt him to create the world. (3) God created human beings in his own image so that his glory might be displayed by being known and enjoyed by them. (4) Christ came into the world and accomplished his work so that all who receive Jesus as their Savior, Lord, and Treasure would be justified and fitted to know and enjoy God forever. (5) The enjoyment of God above all else is the deepest way that God's glory is reflected to, and terminates on, God. (6) Nevertheless, God has constituted us so that our enjoyment of him overflows in visible acts of love to others. (7) The only God-glorifying love and joy is rooted in the true knowledge of God. (8) Therefore, the right knowledge of God and his ways is the servant of God-glorifying joy in him and love for people. (9) Therefore healthy biblical doctrine should not be marginalized or minimized, but rather embraced and cherished as the basis for building friendships and churches. (10) And, thus, the church should become that for which it was created, namely, the pillar and buttress of truth, joy, and love in order to display the glory of God and the supremacy of Christ in all things.

Whereas Piper's chapter focuses on one of the petitions from John 17, D. A. Carson's chapter examines all five of the petitions Jesus offers for his followers, namely, that God the Father will (1) keep them safe; (2) make them one; (3) and sanctify them; and that his followers will

(4) experience the full measure of Jesus' own joy; and (5) be with him forever. Carson also identifies each petition's ground or reason, purpose, and connection to the theme of love. He then connects all of this with the supremacy of Christ and how it relates to Christ's love for the Father and for us. He closes by briefly considering how other voices—those of critical scholarship, ecumenism, and postmodernism—respond to these truths. Fittingly, the chapter closes in the language of biblical worship.

### **Gospel Theologizing and Contextualizing**

Tim Keller suggests that our current cultural situation poses a crisis for the way evangelicals have been doing evangelism for the past 150 years, causing us to raise crucial questions like: How do we do evangelism today? How do we get the gospel across in a postmodern world? Keller believes that we need to rethink our ordinary way of doing ministry due to the cultural changes (especially in secularized Europe and places in the United States that are similar) and the fact that the church is now on a mission field. He proposes six ways that the church has to change, finding parallels in Jonah and his mission to the great pagan metropolis of Nineveh. Keller calls these six factors (1) gospel theologizing (*all* of theology must be an exposition of the gospel); (2) gospel realizing (we can “know” the gospel and yet not truly *know* the gospel); (3) gospel urbanizing (many Christians must move to the city, urbanize the gospel, and create strong versions of gospel communities); (4) gospel communication (through evangelism that is intelligible, credible, plausible, thorough, progressive, and process-oriented); (5) gospel humiliation (Christ's power is evident through your weakness); and (6) gospel incarnation (within a pagan city God's people are to be neither withdrawn nor assimilated but, rather, distinct and engaged). In conclusion, Keller asks if we might be insulting God with our small ambitions and low expectations for evangelism today.

Mark Driscoll begins his chapter by noting the ways in which Jesus continues to be used in pop culture. With regard to the historical Christ, he suggests that liberals and Emergents have overemphasized the incarnation/humanity of Jesus at the expense of the exaltation/divinity of Jesus. Conversely, Jesus' exaltation/divinity is overemphasized by conservatives and fundamentalists at the expense of his incarnation/humanity. Driscoll argues that both truths must be equally emphasized. Driscoll goes

on to argue for a “two-handed approach to Christian ministry” whereby the timeless truths of Christianity are held in a firmly closed hand, and timely ministry methods and styles are held loosely in a gracious open hand. Among the truths for which we must *contend* are (1) Scripture as inerrant, timeless truth; (2) the sovereignty and foreknowledge of God; (3) the virgin birth of Jesus; (4) our sin nature and total depravity; (5) Jesus’ death as our penal substitution; (6) Jesus’ exclusivity as the only possible means of salvation; (7) God-designed complementary male and female gender distinctions; (8) the conscious eternal torments of hell; (9) the preeminence of God’s kingdom over human culture; and (10) the recognition that Satan and demons are real and at work in the world. Once we have rightly understood these truths, we are then ready to *contextualize* Christian belief and practice to varying cultures and subcultures. Driscoll closes by showing that this was the very strategy of Calvin’s church-planting philosophy and program.

### **Conversations with the Contributors**

The final section of the book contains interviews conducted with the contributors, allowing them to flesh out some of their points and to address issues not covered in their chapters.

### **Our Prayer**

In submitting this work for publication and entrusting it now to you, the reader, our hope is that you will find in these pages material that both edifies and instructs. Not every chapter has to be read—certainly not in order. But our prayer is that God would use these essays—for his glory and for your good—to meet your needs and to edify the church of Jesus Christ as we seek to “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) and simultaneously “become all things to all people, that by all means [we] might save some . . . for the sake of the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:22–23).

### **Acknowledgements**

We wish to thank several people who have helped us with this project. Without Jon Bloom (the executive director at Desiring God) and Scott Anderson (the conference director), there would have been no confer-

ence and, therefore, no book. We are thankful to Crossway Books—especially Lane Dennis and Allan Fisher—not only for publishing this book but for believing in and promoting the vision of God and ministry that it embodies. David Mathis and Sherah Baumgarten have helped time and again with excellent administrative and editorial assistance. Lydia Brownback skillfully edited the book under a tight timeline, and Carol Steinbach once again lent her expertise in creating the indexes that serve readers so well. Our wives, Noël Piper and Lea Taylor, have made our homes a pleasant place to be and have served us through their servant-heart patience and encouragement.

We have dedicated this book to John Stott, who retired from public ministry at the age of 86 in July of 2007. John is a faithful student of both Christ and culture, and we honor the legacy of his Christ-exalting ministry, in both word and deed.