

# God's Peculiar Glory

by John Piper

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*John Piper's sermon explores the glory of God as the ultimate source of human satisfaction and the foundation for unwavering faith in diverse cultures.*

**Duration:** 48:30

**Scripture:** Psalm 19:1, John 1:14, 2 Corinthians 4:4-6

**Topics:** "Gods Glory", "Christian Worldview"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the concept of the glory of God, emphasizing that nothing is more beautiful, valuable, or satisfying than God Himself. The speaker reflects on a theological shift towards a God-centered worldview inspired by Jonathan Edwards' insights. The focus is on how God's glory is communicated through creation, the incarnation of Jesus, and the Gospel, leading to a deep conviction of the truth of Scripture through a sight of God's peculiar glory.

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## Transcript

No one is more beautiful, no one is more valuable, no one is more significant or weighty, no one is more satisfying than God. And when the beauty and the value and the weight and the satisfying nature of God radiates out for our perception and our discernment, we call it the glory of God. And that's what I have been thinking about for 45 years or so, the glory of God.

When I was in seminary, I had a kind of Copernican revolution theologically from a very, I think, man-exalting, man-centered vision of the world to a God-exalting, God-centered vision. And the main dead teacher outside the Bible that helped me was Jonathan Edwards, and the main book that helped me was his book, *The End For Which God Created The World*. And the point of *The End For Which God Created The World* was that the end for which God created the world was the exaltation of His glory communicated to His people for their happiness.

It was a life-stamping, life-changing read. I saw as he led me through the Bible that God does everything He does in order to exalt and display, communicate to the hearts of His creatures the beauty and the value and the weight and the significance and the satisfying nature of His glory. And what came together, and if you've read any of my books, I think it's in all of them, more or less, is the fact that this is not megalomania, that God is totally committed to exalting God, but that it is love.

Because if you happen to be God, the only way you can love people supremely is by giving them yourself for their enjoyment, because there isn't any better gift to give. Now, if I were to give you, me, for your enjoyment, that would not be love, because there's something way better that I could give you, namely, God. God doesn't have anything better.

He's, forgive me, Lord, stuck with being God. He must love us by exalting Himself and then offering Himself to us for the satisfaction of our souls, because He made us that way. All of our other pleasures in life are echoes of that pleasure.

We only knew what we're made for. So, it's a glorious thing to discover that God is totally committed to exalting God, and that that's really good news for sinners, through Jesus, who paid all my debts, so that I could have God. Not as an incineration of me and my sin, but as a father and a shepherd and a king, displaying all of His excellencies to me for my delight forever.

Now, in the last two years, for whatever reason God led me this way, I'm happy with it. Sixty-nine last year, I'm seventy now. For the last two years, He has led me to focus almost all of my energies on thinking about the Bible, His Word, because I was saying to Greg, as we were sitting, it was in the airport, we were talking about this, I said, my life is really strange.

I just spend all of my time looking at a book, and then I go tell people what I saw, and then I go look at the book some more, and then people come and ask me questions, and I go look at the book, and say what I saw in the book. I mean, think about it. What a strange life.

If you took the book out of the equation, what would I do? I'd have to come up with ideas and fancy thoughts and clever turns of phrase. And we have a book from God, or do we? That's the question. So, last year, Desiring God gave me an eight-week, I think it was six weeks last year, and they said, go away and write a book about how to read the Bible, because you're doing these look at the book things online.

Write a book about how you do that. And I went and I wrote the wrong book, because the way my mind is wired, as I began to think about, okay, I've got to help people understand how to read the book, and the voice just kept coming up, how do they know it's true? How do they know it's true? Why would they give so much energy to it? Why would you devote the last season of your life to thinking about a book, for goodness sakes? Think about something else. Why would you do that? Why would you go around the world asking people to stake their life on a message of this book? And I just had to deal with that.

So, that's what I wrote A Peculiar Glory about, and that's what I want to talk about here in this message for the few minutes we have together. So, here's a little background to that. When I was in seminary, about age 22, I grew up believing the Bible.

I mean, if you were to ask me at age 18, or ask me now, why did you first believe the Bible? An honest answer is, my mom and dad told me it was true. That's why a kid believes the Bible when he's six, or four, or eight. And that's right.

Kids ought to believe what their parents tell them is true, which is why parenting is such a weighty responsibility. That won't cut it at 16, 26, 36. It's got to grow.

You've got to make it your own, and there better be some good reasons. So, along about 22, I'm listening to apologetic arguments, and I'm thinking, that's helpful. Argument for the resurrection, argument that Jesus really rose, argument that he therefore tells the truth, argument that he believes the Old Testament,

argument that he prepared for the new.

We've got foundations, historical foundations. And to this day, I do not belittle that apologetic labor. Praise God for people who give their effort to write those books, and answer those questions, and provide as much historical foundation for our believing the truth of the Bible as is possible.

But here was the problem for just the way I am, and everything I write is kind of, you know, everybody does what they do because of who they are, and who God's making us. So, I would go out of those lectures thinking, oh, that was helpful. I feel so good.

I feel so, I could take the world with this confidence I have. And about a week later, I'm trying to reconstruct the argument I heard in class. I had five steps in the argument.

This was number one, number two. I can't remember number three. I can't remember the third step in the argument.

Now, what if I was in a conversation right now with a really smart unbeliever, and he was pushing me, and I'm trying to give him all the solid basis that I heard in class, and I can't remember the third step in the argument. This was an existential crisis, because I thought to myself, if my steady-state confidence in Jesus, the message of this book, and all of its practical details that make you or not take stands on whatever, if my steady-state confidence rises and falls with my ability to recall and reconstruct sophisticated philosophical and historical arguments, I'm cooked. People think I'm smart.

I'm not smart. I cannot remember stuff. I can't remember.

I can't reconstruct. Then it hit me, well, forget about Piper. What about the villager in Nigeria who's preliterate, and he hears the gospel, and somebody tells him enough of the story, he believes.

Can a preliterate villager in Nigeria have a sufficient confidence so that he can die for this message and not be a fool as he dies? Which means there's enough warrant, there's enough foundation, there's enough ground and reason under his confidence. He's not an idiot to lay down his life for what he just heard a few months ago. And my answer is, if there's not, I'm done with Christianity, because as I read the book, this Christianity spreads to all cultures, all peoples of all times, and everybody is responsible to believe it and die for it.

He who would come after me, let him take up his cross and deny himself and follow me. If you don't, you're not a believer, and you're going to hell. That is an unbelievable expectation put upon an average human being everywhere in the world when they hear this word coming out of this book.

You would say, Lord, how in the world can you put such an expectation for that kind of sacrifice on a human being? What's the foundation of it? So for me, it's not mainly about providing the new atheists arguments for why they should believe that are philosophically, historically compelling to them. That's not my main agenda. I'm so thankful for people that engage and write those books because I'm thinking about thousands of people, groups all over the world, in different cultures, in different ages of history, and all of them accountable to God.

And they need to hear the gospel. And when they hear the gospel, God has evidently made it possible for them to know, to know the message is true, and I can die for it without being a fool. And I want to know, how do they know? That's what this book is about.

And then existentially, if they could know, I could perhaps know. And maybe there's a kind of knowing that the book is true that wouldn't be dependent on a quick reconstruction of an argument, parts of which I might forget in the moment when I'm called upon to die. You can't do it.

I mean, when they're stacking the wood around your feet, your mind isn't working that way. It isn't. It's got to work another way.

The depth and confidence to die for Jesus has to come from another source than remembered arguments. That was pretty heavy for me, and that's what I want to talk about. So that's the most urgent question.

Not just the atheists, but me and missions and my children or your children. Can a six-year-old know the Bible is true? Can an eight-year-old know the Bible is true with a knowledge that is unshakable and well-grounded with the capacities that an eight-year-old has? That's the kind of question I'm exercised by. So it's really, really relevant to me.

And I want to try to give you a taste of the book is what? 300 pages long, so we got 30 minutes here, and I can't do all of it. But let me show you how I got where I got. I said Edwards was helpful.

Let me quote to you why he was so helpful in this regard in particular. Jonathan Edwards was a pastor in the 18th century, 1703 to 1758. You can hear he died young.

Goodness, I've lived already 15, 16 years longer than him. Wow, wow, what he accomplished. He got fired from his church, and I don't need to go into that.

You can read his biography. There are really good biographies of Edwards. The last eight years of his life, he ministered in a small frontier town among Native Americans called Stockbridge, and the Indians were the Housatonic tribe.

And here this world-class theologian, who probably was the smartest theologian America has ever produced, ministering to non-literate Native Americans the gospel. And he needed to know how do they know, just like I needed to know. And I'm going to read you what he wrote.

Miserable is the condition of the Housatonic Indians and others who have lately manifested a desire to be instructed in Christianity if they can come at no evidence of the truth of Christianity sufficient to induce them to sell all for Christ in any other way but this, the path of historical reasoning. Now, that's a long, complicated sentence. Let me restate it.

How miserable are the Indians if the only path that they have to certainty is the path of historical reasoning? They don't even know there's another world outside of America, let alone 2,000 years of history, let alone Jesus, let alone the Roman Empire, let alone anything except what you can share with them in a few months. Keep reading. There's still a quote.

Thus, a soul may have a kind of intuitive knowledge of divinity of the things exhibited in the gospel, not that he judges the doctrines of the gospel to be from God without any argument or deduction at all, but it is without any long chain of arguments. The argument is but one, and the evidence direct. The mind ascends to the truth of the gospel, but by one step, that is its divine glory.

All John Piper does is try to update Jonathan Edwards. This is all I do with my life, pretty much, and I'm happy to be so, very happy to be dependent on such a... One last paragraph. Unless man may come to a

reasonable, solid persuasion and conviction of the truth of the gospel by the internal evidences of it, namely by a sight of its glory, it is impossible that those who are illiterate and unacquainted with history should have any thorough and effectual conviction of it at all.

I think that's right. So, what is that? What does he mean by internal evidences and sight of its glory? What in the world is that? And that's what I'm going to talk about. I'm going to argue, this book argues, that the simplest person or the most educated person come at an unshakeable conviction, well-grounded, well-founded conviction about the truth of the Scriptures by means of a sight of its glory.

And when I say sight, I don't mean sight with these eyes or these ears, though they are essential. You have to hear the message or read it, but many people read it and hear it and see nothing glorious, but rather a sight with the Ephesians 118 eyes of the heart. I didn't make that phrase up.

That's Paul's phrase, eyes of the heart, probably drawn out from Jesus when he said to the Pharisees, seeing you do not see. Seeing you do not see. You see and don't see.

You hear and don't hear. And you're responsible to do the second seeing, and you're responsible to do the second hearing. And if you don't do it, you're culpable.

You're guilty. What is it? What is seeing that's not with the eyes? What is hearing that's not with the ears? That's what Edwards is arguing is the foundation. Like if anybody in this room were to say, do you believe John Piper standing up there preaching? And you'd say yes, and they'd say why? Reasons.

You probably wouldn't say, I got a thing in the mail that said he was going to be there. It was going to be Friday night. Premise number two, it is Friday night.

Premise number three, it's in the very place where they said he was going to be. Four, it must be him. And I must be here.

You don't do that. You say, there he is. He's there.

And he's saying that physical, that physical argument right there of light coming into your eyeball that's got Piper's shape, that same thing happens spiritually. That's what he's arguing. And I'm going to try to show you from the Bible, that's the way the Bible wants you to think about the foundations of your certainty.

Now, I'm very aware as I do this that I'm going to use some language and describe some things that for some of you, maybe many of you, will be new ways of talking, which can make you nervous. Because if I say, this must happen to you, or you're not saved, or you can't know the Bible, you start to think, I don't even know what he's talking about. I've never used that language in my life.

I just want to give you a little relief here, because when a baby is born, he's really born, suck, suck, breathe, breathe, cry, cry, mess, mess. And he can't describe any of it. He's got to grow up, learn some vocabulary, and then interpret what happened to him.

I was born. I grew in my mommy's tummy. I came out.

I breathe. I understand, but he didn't then. And many of you, praise God, many of you, what I'm going to describe has happened to you, and you could not put these words on it.

Got that? Our experience--I can't say always, but let's just say our experience regularly runs ahead of our ability to describe it. You got that? Our experiences with God regularly run ahead of the robust, biblical way of describing it, which is why I think lots more people are Calvinists than realize they are. But that's another talk.

And those of you who don't even know what that word means, don't worry about it, because that's not what this is about. So, here's what we're going to do for the remainder of our time. I'm going to, in order to try to woo you in and make you comfortable with a biblical way of thinking about foundations for your confidence, in the Bible, I'm going to use three analogies that I put in the book, three analogies that I think you are more familiar with, so that when we get to the one that you may be less familiar with, you say, oh, I kind of get it, because I knew about that.

When he said that, I knew that. And yeah, that is like this. And so, this is not as strange as I thought it was.

So, that's the way I'm thinking to try to help you. So, analogy number one. These are analogies for how God validates or authenticates, confirms the truth of His word through a sight of His glory in it.

Because right now, if I were to take a little survey and go with a microphone to each one of you and say, describe that experience in your past. Describe that for me, your experience of the glory of God in the word that brought you to believe in the word, you'd probably say, that's kind of new to me. That glory talk as a way of knowing, I just... So, analogy number one, Psalm 19.1, the analogy of nature.

The heavens are telling the glory of God, Psalm 19.1. The heavens are telling the glory of God. That means God expects you to look at the stars, sun, moon, galaxies, cosmos, and by implication, I think, subatomic particles and the universe within, as well as the universe without, just all the majestic, incredible, amazing world that God made, and He expects you to see the glory. But here's the catch.

The glory of nature is not the glory of God. It points to the glory of God. It echoes the glory of God.

It leads to the glory of God. Because Einstein looked at the glory of the heavens and went to church and said, I have seen so much more glory than the preachers. I don't think they know what they're talking about.

When I read that about 20 years ago, I thought, God, I don't ever want anybody to say that about me. Please, God, don't let anybody say that when they hear me preach that I just look up in the night sky and I've seen a bigger God than Piper has. Any of you preachers here, make that a resolution.

That'll never happen. God willing, that'll never happen. All that to say, Einstein was not a believer, and he saw glory, and he didn't see the glory of God.

So what does it mean? The heavens are telling the glory of God. I think it means there are eyes here and there are eyes here, and for those who have eyes to see, when these eyes see, these eyes see through. And you know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, God made that.

I mean, have you ever been like me? I mean, I'm walking to church. I've got a path I walk to church. I've probably walked it 10,000 times over the last 35 years.

I have a seven-minute walk from my church, 600 paces door to door. I know the trees. I know the apartments.

I know this walk. Do it blindfolded. And there are seasons of the year when the apple blossoms are coming.

I know the weekend. I know the concert that always happens on that weekend. I mean, everything is beautiful.

And I try sometimes not to believe that God made this tree. I look at this tree, 80 feet tall, branches that probably weigh as much as five cars, and it's March, and 80 feet up there, little buds are coming out, and there's no heart pumping in this tree. Pushing the sap 80 feet into the air.

I mean, I get blood. Feet to head, feet to head. Sap? I don't get that.

You can call it capillarity or whatever. I say, that's a miracle. Now, even if you explain it, like put a name on it, capillarity.

That helps. I cannot not believe God made that tree. Now, you may think that's naive.

I think when I stand at the judgment day, and all the nations are gathered, and I'm standing there before the living God, and God looks out over all the atheists who didn't believe God made the trees, they're going to look ridiculous. I think that's what this verse means. The heavens, the trees, the human eyeball.

My wife's just got two cataract implants. Are you kidding me? They cut your eyes, take a new lens in. Yes, I cannot not believe that God made it.

Now, that's the kind of seeing, or Paul, here's another key verse on this point. So, we're still on analogy number one, nature. This is Romans 1, 19 to 21.

What can be known about God is plain to them. That's everybody. Read the context in Romans 1. This is all the nations.

That's why everybody's accountable, even though they haven't heard the gospel. They're just accountable to know what they know. What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

For His invisible attributes, namely His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made, clearly perceived. They know, so they are without excuse, for although they knew God, everybody you meet in the airport knows God, and then they suppress it. Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or give thanks to Him, but became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

What does that mean? They know God. I think it means there's an inner template or mold that is perfectly made for the fitting of God into the human heart. Click, and we filled it up with other stuff.

So we sing about other stuff, and the Holy Spirit has to come in there and scrape it all out, and God goes, click! And we say, yes! Just an immediate yes! God made the world. There's no way around it. So, the analogy is, many people look at the world of God, and don't see God as world maker.

Many people look at the word of God, and don't see the word as, or don't see God as the word inspirer. There's the analogy. Got that? So, you know about glory in nature.

You used that language a long time, probably. Analogy number two, Jesus, the incarnation. Listen to John 1.14. The word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory.

Got that? We beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. So, when John looked at Jesus, he just looked like you, just like you. Middle Eastern, dark skin, black hair, beard, probably.

Just ordinary, like every other man that time. And they saw the Son of God. So, John 14.8, Philip said to him, Lord, show us the Father, and it's enough for us.

And Jesus said to him, Have I been with you so long, and you still don't know me? That's breathtaking. Show us the Father, the creator of the universe, the ruler of all things. Have I been with you so long, and you don't know me? That is staggering.

Here's the problem. Judas saw him up close for three years, and didn't see him. He sold him.

What's wrong with Judas? John said, we beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. Judas didn't. Pharisees didn't.

Do you remember the raising of Lazarus from the dead? And Jesus prays out loud, so that they'll all know that he's asking the Father to raise him from the dead. And he says to Martha, if you believe, you'll see the glory of God. Lazarus, come forth.

And the dead man, through the command of the King of kings, receives life and obeys. Yes, dead people can obey if God is commanding. So he comes out.

You know what the Pharisees did? They plotted to kill him. What can you do? Let's kill him. He raised someone from the dead.

That's blindness. It's not the kind of blindness that gives anybody an excuse. That's wicked blindness.

That's a blindness that's so in love with your position, and so in love with your tradition, and so in love with your self-exaltation, and your long prayers in the synagogues, and you're standing on the street corners, and you're having the best place at the synagogues and the feasts. I'm not giving that up, not even for somebody who raises the dead. That's blindness.

So, analogy. A human comes into the world, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and he happens to be, by virtue of a virgin birth and a miracle of incarnation, the very God-man. And the way you should know that is, we beheld his glory.

So, when you read the Gospels, or the epistles which are written to unpack the Gospels, when you read them, you should ask God to show you that. Do you see the glory of Jesus? Because if you see it, you know. You know.

Just like you know the light is shining in the ceiling. Glory is in Jesus. So, one of the best evangelistic things you can do is just do a Bible study with the Gospel of John, or Mark, or Luke.

If people have a zillion arguments, just say, would you take 12 weeks with me, or just a few lunches with me, and let's just let him talk. Just watch him. Just watch him.

He may, by grace, stand forth with irresistibly beautiful glory. So, that's analogy number two, the incarnation. So, first, nature or creation, and second analogy, incarnation.

And, having Jesus prove who He is by the glory that He shows through the way He talks, and the way He acts, the whole package of the way He is. Okay, one more. Analogy number three, namely, the Gospel.

So, nature, incarnation, Gospel. This one is probably the most important, because it's so close to Scripture in the analogy, because the Gospel is a narrative. It's a story from the Scriptures about the death and resurrection of Jesus, and what He accomplished when He died.

How do you hear the Gospel and know it's true? Listen to 2 Corinthians 4.4. 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 4. The God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers. Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing. Okay, now, what are they supposed to see, which they don't see when the Gospel is proclaimed? To keep them from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

When the Gospel is told, the very nature of it emits a spiritual glory or light that if Satan could be conquered, and if our own inveterate love of darkness could be overcome, it would stream into our hearts with a powerful, yes, that's real, that's true. That's how people get saved. You don't know how it happens, but that's how it happens, according to verse 4. Now, verse 6, two verses later, is the miracle that enables it to happen.

God, who said, let light shine out of darkness at the first creation, has shown into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. So, verse 4 and verse 6 are parallel. The light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

So, glory of Christ, image of God, glory of God in the face of Christ, same glory, and both of them are the way that we know the Gospel is true. Have you seen the glory of Christ in the Gospel? That's really an important question. Now that I've given you language from the Bible that says you must, do you? Is there something about the Gospel and Jesus in the Gospel, standing forth from it, that makes you say, that's not made up, that's not human artifice, that's not mythological, that's real, and I'll stake my life on it.

The reason I call it a peculiar glory, that's the title of the book, a peculiar glory is because I'm not interested in generic glory, like a three-pointer buzzer beater to win the tournament. Like, that's glorious. It doesn't save anybody.

It doesn't make anybody know something glorious, but it's pretty amazing, and we come out of our couches, if you can get out of your couch. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about a peculiar glory.

What I mean is a inexplicable, inimitable, unparalleled coming together of diverse excellencies, that's Edward's phrase, diversities. Diverse excellencies like majesty and meekness in Jesus. Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient, even unto death, even the death on the most horrible, horrible, tortured, shaming thing from God to shame.

That's amazing. That is true. I will stake my life on it.

That man is true. Even if you say, oh, they made it up. No, they didn't make that up.

It's woven into the fabric of the Bible. It's woven into the fabric of my heart. It's woven into the fabric of the world that that kind of peculiar glory, that he dwells in the high and holy place.

And with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, there is no God like our God. In fact, that's exactly the way Isaiah argued, isn't it? Who has seen a God like you? Now, that rhetorical question, who has seen a God like you, means nobody. Okay, you got that? Nobody has seen a God like you.

Go to the Hindus. Go to the Muslims. Go to Jews who don't believe in Jesus.

Go to all the religions of the world. Who has seen a God like you? Who, you know what comes next? Works for those who wait for him. All the gods make you work for them.

God works for you. Out of his height, out of his infinite, glorious, holy, unimpeachable height, he comes and dies and saves and pours out his spirit to carry you and help you. He works for those who wait for him.

There is no God like this God. There's no glory like this glory. If God gives you eyes here, these eyes, and you read the Bible cover to cover, over and over again, you will see the peculiar glory of God woven into this book such that you will know this book is God's book.

That's the argument. And the only thing left to say is nobody will ever see that glory without a miracle, right? You can sit there and try as hard as you want right now to screw up the eyes of your heart to see, and you can't make it happen because we're all blind. We're all dead.

We all love our self and our self-exaltation, and we love the darkness, and we cannot see, which is why verse 6 of 2 Corinthians 4 has to happen. Namely, God shines in our hearts to give his sight. The natural person, Paul said, 1 Corinthians 2.14, the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he's not able to understand them.

So, I close by simply saying there are three analogies. God shows that He made the world. He validates His making the world, being the one who produced the world by revealing His glory through the world.

God validates and shows for our confidence that He sent Jesus as the Son of God into the world, and He does it by revealing His glory through the Son, and He gives the gospel, and the gospel is validated by being a revelation of the glory of Christ. And I simply take that biblical line and draw it one step further and say, that's the way the whole Bible works. That's the way the whole Bible is validated for the sake of the simplest person in the world who has no access to philosophical or historical reasoning, and only has a clear, good, solid presentation from a holy book to their minds.

The Holy Spirit can take that and say, glory. And they have a warranted foundation for dying for Jesus. So, let's pray.

Father, I ask now that these friends here would be granted eyes to see the eyes of the heart. And I pray that they would be given freedom from the kind of bondage that holds us in darkness, and that You would shine by Your grace and power into our hearts, that we might see the beauty, and the value, and the weightiness, and the all-satisfying greatness of Yourself and Your Son revealed in the Scriptures. And thus, know this is not a book from man.

But from God. I pray this in Jesus' name.

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