

# Suffering for the Sake of the Body - Lesson 2

by John Piper

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*John Piper's sermon explores God's sovereignty over suffering, temptation, and spiritual blindness, emphasizing the power of prayer and the Gospel in overcoming evil.*

**Duration:** 23:24

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:3, Matthew 6:33, Acts 26:18, Romans 11:25, 2 Corinthians 4:4, 2 Corinthians 4:6, 2 Timothy 2:24

**Topics:** "Evangelism", "Sovereignty"

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## Description

In this sermon, John Piper discusses the role of believers in sharing the gospel with those who are in bondage to sin. He emphasizes the importance of behaving with kindness and patience, while also correcting those who oppose the truth. Piper encourages believers to boldly preach the gospel to open the eyes of those who are spiritually blind and lead them to repentance and knowledge of the truth. He also highlights God's sovereignty over Satan's spiritual captivity and reminds believers that all things belong to God and bring Him glory.

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## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at [www.DesiringGod.org](http://www.DesiringGod.org) Seven out of ten. God's sovereignty over Satan's use of animals and plants.

Now you say, what in the world is that? Ponder this. Lions kill people. Snakes bite people and they die.

But what's the real killer animal? Well, man, but what are some others? Drug? Germs? Well, let's just think of a few. Viruses? Bacterias? What about the African black fly? What about mosquitoes and malaria? Malaria probably kills more people. There's probably no probably about it.

Probably no probably. Some of you know a lot better than I do. I mean, I would just get some... Malaria kills millions of people in Africa every year compared to what heart disease does here.

And malaria is carried by mosquitoes. So it really matters a lot when it comes to suffering whether God has control over mosquitoes or not. Whether He can say bite or don't bite to this little missionary child.

They've got the net over him. There's one little mosquito out of the 500 in this room that has the germ. And he makes his way under the net and is crawling around on the baby's face.

Who decides whether he bites? Revelation 12.9 And the great dragon... Now you might be a deist. You might be sitting there saying, Nobody decides. The mosquito decides.

You might have that view of the world. That's a deistic view of the world. God winds it up and backs off and it all functions according to laws.

But it really solves no problems whatsoever. Since He does intrude Himself often and we're praying like crazy all the time that He would intrude Himself and that people would be spared disease and healed disease and kept safe on the roads. My son gets up at 5.30 every morning and heads out to drive for Aerogram or what's that company? Anyway, he delivers packages for 5 or 6 hours and I pray every morning, Lord, keep him safe on the road.

He never gets enough sleep. He's going to fall asleep at the wheel. Why do I pray like that? Because I believe God intrudes into cars.

Other people's and mine. And many other ways. I mean, the whole concept of prayer believes we don't have deism here with God way off on the other side of the universe having wound this up like a clock and letting it run without involvement.

The great dragon was thrown down, Revelation 12.9. The serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan who deceives the whole world, he was thrown down to the earth and his angels were thrown down with him. Now, the only reason I included that is so that you would see the connection between the serpent and the devil. I had a hard time finding, frankly, instances in the Bible where the devil is involved with animals.

I just think, in principle, he probably is. At least there's that one picture where a serpent was evidently somehow used by the devil to tempt. But what I'm more interested in is whether God rules animals.

Jonah is amazing in this regard because you've got God commanding fish and wind and worms and plants. The Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah. How do you suppose He did that? Jonah 2.10. The Lord commanded.

That's how He did it. He commanded the fish and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land. So God can say to any fish He pleases, swallow that denarius that just fell into the water.

Swim around for a few hours. Go bite Peter's hook so that he can pay the temple tax. The fish goes and bites Peter's hook and gets pulled up and Peter takes the denarius out and goes and pays the temple tax.

That's what happened. That's what happened. Jonah 4.6. The Lord God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade.

So He appointed a plant to grow up to give him shade. Jonah 4.7. The Lord appointed a worm so worms are in control. So if your kid has worms, God can tell the worms to die or to stop eating or anything He wants to tell them to do, He can tell them and they'll obey Him.

God's sovereignty over Satan's temptations to sin. Now here we're getting closer to Verner's concern and all of our concern with regard to moral evil in the world. Let's take Judas as an example.

Acts 2.23 This man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death. So the death of Jesus here is by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God. Nevertheless, under that sovereign plan, you have Satan

acting.

Satan, Luke 22.3-4, entered into Judas, who was called Iscariot, belonging to the number of the twelve. And he went away and discussed with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him. So Judas was influenced by Satan to bring about this series of events that are called the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.

Or, even more clearly in Acts 4.27, for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed both Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles, and the peoples of Israel. So the four big actors here Herod, Pontius Pilate, soldiers, and the crowds to do whatever your hand and your purpose predestined to occur. Namely, sin.

There isn't any greater sin in the world than what Herod and Pontius Pilate and the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel did. It's a sin for Herod to cloak him in purple and mock him. It's a sin for Pontius Pilate to wash his hands and say expediently, you take him.

I don't want to do it. As well as have him scourged. It's a sin for the soldiers to pound the nails into his hand and cast lots for his clothing.

And it's a sin for the people to cry out, crucify him, crucify him, and carry through the murderous intent. And it's all predestined by God to occur. So Satan is active.

Very active. There's a lot of satanic stuff going on in that crowd, and in Pilate, and in Herod, and in the soldiers. But all unwittingly fulfilling prophecy and the predestined plan of God.

Let me just put in a sentence a way for you to perhaps try to handle that. So, I'm trying to create a category now. Alright? I'm trying to create a category in your brain.

And here it is. God can... A musical introduction to the category. Drum roll.

God does not sin in ordaining that sin be. God does not sin in ordaining that sin come to pass. God does not sin in ordaining that sin come to pass.

It is not sin in the heart of God in willing that there be a world in which there is sin. And ordaining that there be sin and governing over the extent and the restraint of sin. Now if that doesn't fit your categories, I simply encourage you to suspend judgment for a while and immerse yourself in the Bible.

Because that sentence doesn't come out of nowhere. It comes out of struggling with texts like these for decades. That's how theology is born.

It's an effort to give credit to passages like this. Take Simon Peter. That was Judas.

Here's Simon Peter. This is shorter, easier. Jesus says in Luke 22.31, Simon, Simon.

Behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat. Or literally, Satan has requested to sift you like wheat. This is just like Job, right? Satan comes to God and says, I want to push Peter through the mesh of this sift and see if I can get the faith out of him.

And here's the response. Jesus says in verse 32, Peter, I have prayed for you. What did he ask? Evidently, he didn't ask this time that he would not stumble.

Only that he would not fall. I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.

Now that's a sovereign Christ talking. He knows he's coming down three times. He's already told him.

Three times you're going to deny me. Where's that next? I think it's next. Three times you're going to deny me tonight because Satan has asked to have you and I have prayed this far and no farther.

And I know that you will turn. I know that you will turn. Because I have prayed that you will turn.

I've asked my Father to cause you to turn. And when you have turned, strengthen your brothers. And here we might ask, can you think of any possible reasons God might let the leash out this far? If Christ can pray to the Father, He looks into heaven as it were and He sees Satan and God and Satan is saying, give me Peter.

And God says, let me consult with my son. He consults with the son and the son says, three denials and no further. And God says to Satan, three denials.

Which is why when Jesus looked over His shoulder, sovereignly, after the third denial and connected eyes with Peter, He did not do what Judas did and kill Himself. He wept. And it was a repentance unto life.

And He's been strengthening this brother ever since with His humanity. Right? He wrote a letter. He wrote two letters.

And what a great word He gave to us out of His brokenness. Number nine. I think we might do it.

Let's see if we can just get through them quickly here. So the point there was God is sovereign over Satan's powers of temptation. Thus far and no further.

No temptation has befallen you. But God always will make at the right time a way of escape. God's sovereignty over Satan's mind-blinding power.

Mind-blinding power. Here's where I get that. 2 Corinthians 4. In whose case the God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

So clearly the God of this world blinds the minds of unbelievers. Now what's to become of them? Two verses later, verse 6, here's what God can do. God who said, let light shine out of darkness, is the one who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

God can obliterate the darkness in the human heart. With the same power that He used on the day of creation when He said, let there be light. He can speak into any human heart He pleases.

Let there be light. And there will be light. Here's another example of it.

If in fact Satan is blinding the minds of unbelievers, then surely he has something to do with the hardness that has come upon Israel that is talked about in Romans 11. Romans 11.25 I do not want you to be ignorant brethren or to be uninformed of this mystery so that you will not be wise in your own estimation that a partial hardening has happened to Israel. That is, hardening upon part of Israel.

How long will this hardening last? Now if you didn't believe that God could determine such things, you'd have to say, well, until they decide not to let it last any longer because it's their own free will alone that is causing it. And therefore it will go away when they decide for it to go away, which is not what the text says. This hardening has happened to Israel until a certain time.

Until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And when the fullness of the Gentiles comes in, and God knows what that fullness is, all Israel will be saved. God will remove ungodliness from Jacob.

He will take away the blinding effects of Satan. He will say, no longer do you have the right to blind this people anymore. Paul was involved in that kind of deliverance and so are we.

Acts 26.18 Christ sends Paul to open the eyes so that they may turn from the darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God. See that? He sends them to open their eyes. This is what happens when the Gospel is being preached.

So if you wonder, is there a territorial spirit over Philip's neighborhood that causes blindness? There may be. Spiritual blindness. There may be.

What do you do about that? You get bold as a lion and you go in there and you preach the Gospel to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the authority of Satan to God and they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in me. There's no talk there about some kind of preliminary discernment about what kind of demon there is. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who is believing.

Number 10. Last one. God's sovereignty over Satan's spiritual captivity.

Satan's bondage. 2 Timothy 2.24 The Lord's bond servant... Now, this could be any one of you as you go home tonight to a roommate or to a family member who is in the gall of iniquity and in the bond of Satan. How should you behave? And what should you say? And who will do the delivering? The Lord's bond servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach.

Fill them with truth and be kind. Patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition. Here's the key.

That's what you do. That's your part. If, perhaps, God may grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.

Grant repentance. If, perchance, God may grant them repentance and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare or the bondage or the trap of the devil having been held captive by him to do his will. So, how do you get the captives free? You love them and you teach them.

And God frees them. And, of course, prayer should be stirred in there as well. And I do believe in exorcisms.

There are extraordinary oppressions and possessions that are manifestly demonic in a way that go beyond something like this probably in which cases there may be room for confronting Satan directly. Well, that's the ten. And then I simply put a few texts on here to refer to the removal of Satan altogether which happens at the end of the age in Matthew 25-41.

He will say on that day, the Lord Jesus will say to those on His left, depart from Me, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels. And that's described in Revelation 20, verse 10. The devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are also.

They will be tormented day and night forever and ever. There is coming a day when we will not have to be confronted with this enemy anymore. Now that poses the question that I'm going to start with tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

Namely, why? What is the purpose of global suffering? And the first part of that will be what's the purpose of letting Satan on the loose? If he's irredeemable and there's no hope that he will come to repentance and he's going to suffer in hell forever, then do it now. And he doesn't do it now. Father in heaven, we have been drenched tonight with Your... And we tremble and bow.

You said, work out Your salvation with fear and trembling. This is the man to whom I will look, He who trembles at my word. So Lord, You are a great and sovereign God.

Oh, the depth of the wisdom and the knowledge of God. How inscrutable are Your judgments and how unsearchable are Your ways. Who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been Your counselor? Who has ever given a gift to You that He should be repaid? For from You and through You and to You are all things.

To You belongs the glory and the dominion forever and ever. You're dismissed. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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