

Live Peaceably With All, if Possible

by John Piper

The sermon emphasizes the importance of humility and faith in Jesus Christ as the opposite of pride, which prevents us from feeling genuine empathy with others.

Duration: 46:25

Scripture: Romans 12:14-21

Topics: "Christian Humility", "Overcoming Persecution"

Description

In this sermon, Pastor John Piper focuses on Romans 12:16, which instructs believers to not be haughty, associate with the lowly, and never be conceited. He explores the connection between this verse and the previous verse, which encourages believers to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. Piper explains that pride is attacked in two ways: by humbling oneself and by having a Christ-dependent, Christ-exalting humility. He emphasizes that humility is a gift from God and a result of being born again. The sermon concludes with a discussion of how believers should respond to persecution and evil, encouraging them to bless their persecutors, live in harmony, and overcome evil with good.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at www.desiringgod.org. Romans 12, 14 to 21. Bless those who persecute you.

Bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep.

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited.

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For by so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Let's pray together. Father, I ask that you would come on this Sunday morning as people are attending to this Word and kill our pride.

If it's painful, Lord, to me or any of us, grant us grace to endure the pain. Bring us through this surgery, I pray, on the other side, broken, healed, and humble through faith in Jesus Christ. May we turn away from ourselves and find in Christ our all in all.

For those who are in this room, not loving Christ, not trusting Christ, not banking on Christ or treasuring Christ, I pray that Christ would come in power through this Word and make Himself known, real, compelling to every heart. In His name I pray, Amen. I mentioned last time that one of the reasons that we don't do verse 15, that is, rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, is because we are glad that they're weeping and maybe mad that they're rejoicing.

In other words, one of the reasons you might not obey verse 15 is because you're really angry at somebody because of something they've done to you and therefore if they start rejoicing, you're upset and if they start weeping, you're glad. That would be one reason why we disobey verse 15. And I pointed out that verse 14 therefore is clearly the opposite of that.

Bless those who persecute you. In other words, don't hold a grudge against them, bless and do not curse them. So God is calling you now to be a different kind of person than you are by nature.

A kind of person, not just a kind of behavior. Blessing is something you do from your heart. You might have the willpower not to punch somebody, but you can't by willpower have a heart that wants them to be happy when they've wronged you.

That's a gift. That's the kind of people Christians are. Which is why to be a Christian is to be born again.

It's not a mere choice. It's a miracle where the Holy Spirit moves into your life by the gospel, gets a hold of you, shows Christ to be an all-sufficient, beautiful Savior and transforms you from the inside out so that you do crazy, radical things like this paragraph is all about. And then I said last time that I would tell you some more reasons why we don't typically do verse 15.

And I have six of them. And I'm going to tell you what they are very briefly and you see if you recognize yourself in any of these. Six more reasons why we don't find ourselves doing rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

Find it easy when you're near a hurting person to hurt. Find it easy when you're near children who are laughing to get out and laugh with them. Find it easy.

Be that kind of person. So here are six more reasons why we're not that way. One, we're too wrapped up in ourselves to rejoice with those who weep.

So self-oriented that what's happening in other people's hearts doesn't affect us. Second, we feel above the emotional life of ordinary people. Children laugh, women cry, I'm a man.

Or, it doesn't have to be mere male arrogance, it just may be highbrow arrogance, male and female. To laugh with them, to cry with them would put me down at their level. I have a certain refined way about me, a certain aristocratic, high culture status to maintain and I don't cry with people and I don't laugh with little children.

I'm an aristocrat. Third, we are hypercritical and our main reaction when we see emotion is to analyze it and point out its distortions and its excesses and its bad tendencies and its shallow roots. And so our

hypercritical, analytical heart keeps us emotionally at a distance from people and prevents our hearts from any empathy.

I think there are a lot more people like that than we care to admit. Our first reaction, I think I know this one firsthand, our first reaction is to analyze the joy or the pain. Not to feel it first.

Join it for we are resentful or envious that they have joy and we don't. We feel gypped, passed over, got a raw deal. So envy makes it impossible for us to rejoice with those who rejoice because it calls to mind that our circumstance isn't so good and we're upset about that.

Five, we are simply the kind of personality that doesn't have a discernible emotional life. We don't rejoice or weep with anything, over anything. And so we don't weep with those who weep and we don't rejoice with those who rejoice.

It may be because your parents were that way or treated you a certain way. It may be a traumatic experience or it may be a physical condition that you have. Six, we may be so depressed that we are too emotionally numb to feel anything.

Those last two are not the same as the first four. They do have roots in sin, but they're not sinful in the same direct, immediate way that the first four are. And I think our patience should be longer with people in those last two categories than in the first four.

Now, what I've tried to do for weeks and indeed for years is to bore in and try to penetrate to the bottom of the root cause of these things. I've just thrown out causes of why we aren't all we should be in relation to verse 15. And here's my answer to that question.

I think the root cause under all six of those is pride. The root cause of not being the kind of people who feel genuine empathy with somebody hurting or somebody happy is pride. So I want to think with you today about pride.

I want to think a lot about it. We're going to see it talked about later in the text, but let's ponder it. Pride has a lot of different expressions.

Some are very famous and we recognize them right away. Most of them are not. Let me articulate three forms of pride and may the Holy Spirit come and use this description to get at us and heal us.

First, there is the self-preoccupied person. Now, this is a person who thinks continually about himself. He might be very self-effacing and so look humble.

But inside his cocoon, he's consumed with thoughts about himself. He may not even like himself, but he's still the center of his attention. His self-hate may have no power to produce humility.

It just makes his pride pathetic and miserable. That's a very subtle and deadly form of pride. And it is unable to feel another person's pain and authentically weep with them.

And it is unable to feel another person's happiness and authentically be happy with them. It is totally self-preoccupied. Second, there is the self-infatuated person.

Now, this person does feel quite good about himself. He's not only occupied with himself, he likes being the center of his own attention. And he thinks that others would like it too, probably, if they knew him well

enough.

He may or may not be outgoing, but he finds himself entertaining and intelligent and handsome or shrewd or pretty, enjoys preening himself, even if nobody is impressed. He is. Third, there is the self-exalting person.

Now, this is the person we're more familiar with. When this person comes along, we say pride. This person goes beyond self-preoccupation and self-infatuation to active efforts to display his qualities.

He really wants other people to see. He wants other people to praise. He is very much in need of their approval, and he works at it and becomes probably pretty good at it.

Now, none of these three forms of pride is able to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. And there are reasons for that. A little qualification.

That last person, that self-exalting type, might become a politician, a church politician or a government politician or a business politician. And politicians, I'm using it in a pejorative sense. I hope a lot of you become Christian politicians so that this stereotype vanishes.

But I'm using it in, like we say, politicking or he's a political person in the church. What they learn is that it's really prudent and expedient to weep with those who weep and to rejoice with those who rejoice, and therefore they get good at it. And we all know the difference between the tears of an actor and the tears of a broken heart.

Right? So here's my question. What's the opposite of this pride, this many-layered, manifold, subtle, universal, human disease that kills and sends to hell? What's the opposite of it, this sympathy-killing, empathy-killing, other-oriented joy-killing, other-oriented sorrow-killing, demon of pride? Now, there are two ways to talk about the opposite of pride. Here's one.

This would be the one we would think of first, I think. Humility. Humility is the opposite of pride.

Humility would mean, then, not thinking of ourselves all the time. Humility would mean not being infatuated with ourselves, but really finding other people quite interesting and being drawn out and into their lives. And humility would mean not exalting ourselves, but really loving to exalt other people wherever we see something virtuous.

Some evidence of grace would make our day to praise another person. That would be the opposite of pride, and it would be humility. Now, here's the problem with that description of the opposite or alternative to pride.

It's godless. There's no Christ in it yet. It's atheistic so far.

So if that looks beautiful to you, period, without any reference to whether it is rooted in, dependent on, and aiming toward Christ, you're probably not a very Christ-centered person. So all the humility I just described had no Christ in it, had no God in it, and therefore it's just so far human, natural, godless, atheistic. So I said there was a second way to describe the opposite of pride.

Here's the second way. It's called faith in Christ. The alternative to pride, the biblical alternative, the Christian alternative, is not natural humility, but faith in Jesus Christ, our Creator, our Redeemer, our Sustainer, our Goal.

The Christian alternative to self-preoccupation is Christ-preoccupation. And the Christian alternative to self-infatuation is Christ-infatuation. And the Christian alternative to self-exaltation is Christ-exaltation.

And if you put other, other, other people where Christ belongs, you're still godless. Let's be more precise. The reason that faith, Christian faith in Jesus Christ, turning away from self to Christ, the reason faith is the opposite of empathy killing pride is because faith is, not just produces, but is humbly resting in Christ.

That's what faith is. Humility is not only the fruit of faith. It's the definition of faith when you put it together like this.

Saving faith is humbly, self-forgettingly, self-despairingly resting in Christ. You can't separate it. If you took the humble piece out of faith, it wouldn't be faith anymore.

Faith is a looking away from me to Christ. So the most profound thing to say about the opposite of pride is that it is faith in Jesus. Now, there's a more radical way to say this, and I want to say it.

Without faith in Christ, there is no humility among men. Without faith in Christ, there is no humility among men. In other words, faith in Christ is not just the Christian alternative or opposite of pride.

It's the only alternative to pride. Where it doesn't exist, all you have is pride. Let me try to explain that.

If you have become a very other-oriented person, but Christ is not in the equation, you're other-oriented and other-infatuated and other-exalting. Christ is not in the equation. You are simply looking to people like yourself and not depending on the God who made you.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, brought the world into being, holds you in existence every moment of your life, died on the cross to take away your guilt and sin. As long as you are blackballing that Savior, as long as He is outside the picture and it's just you and people in your image like you, you're proud. There's only one word for humans who attempt to act humbly with no dependence on their Creator, Jesus, no dependence on their Redeemer, Jesus, no desire that Jesus get glory.

There's only one word for people like that and it's proud to take your existence in your own hands with no delight in your Maker, no cherishing of your Savior, no zeal that He get honor and glory from your life. And you just hang out with people and like people and get strokes from people and give strokes to people. You are a proud and arrogant person.

And that will be made so clear at the judgment day when the God of all the universe calls you to an account for how you related to Him. So, I say it again, faith in Jesus Christ, looking away from ourselves, resting in Him, depending on Him, delighting in Him, treasuring Him, being satisfied in Him is not just a Christian alternative to pride. It's the only alternative to pride.

Christ is the one Lord and one Savior of the universe. Now, at this point, I pose this question to myself thinking someone might ask it. Wow! You spent a long time up till this point in the sermon talking about pride in relation to verse 15 about not rejoicing with those who rejoice and not weeping with those who weep.

If Paul had all that that you just said in mind, why didn't he hear? Let's just ask Paul that. Paul, if you agree that that was a helpful, faithful, biblical, textually warranted ten minutes, why didn't you put that here in this verse? And I think Paul would say this. I spent eleven chapters of this letter laying a foundation for

Christ-centered, Christ-exalting, Bible-saturated, cross-commending, blood-soaked, Spirit-empowered faith as the root of all your righteousness.

I can't say it in every verse as I bring forth a new exhortation. If Piper wants to build it in for ten minutes every time and stretch this book out from one hour to ten years, that's his business. And you'll just have to judge whether I'm making a right choice about stretching this hour-long read into a ten-year project.

But I think that's the way Paul would answer if we took those reflections on pride, all rooted not only back in chapters 1 to 11, the rest of the New Testament. He would say, I suppose if you're going to preach a series on chapter 12 and not turn it into legalism, you better be drawing in the Gospel over and over again from the first chapters. But really, you know why I spent that much time on it? Verse 16.

I'm expositing backwards here. I'm doing all my exposition. I'm going to read the verse.

Verse 16. Paul's the one who brought pride into connection with verse 15. And here we are in verse 16.

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty. Associate with the lowly.

Never be conceited. So right next door to verse 15, weep with those who weep, rejoice with those who rejoice, is don't be haughty. Hang out with lowly people and take up lowly tasks and never be conceited.

And I read this weeks and weeks ago. I said, okay, what these two verses got to do with each other? And that was the last 15 minutes. Now, let's linger on verse 16 for a moment.

Because we got some new things here. Two different ways here Paul attacks pride. Two different ways.

First, he attacks it by talking about the kinds of tasks or people you might be involved in or feel above. The second is to talk about your attitude to yourself. Let me just show you where I'm getting there.

Literally, verse 16 goes like this. Don't be high-minded. That's translated, don't be haughty in ESV.

Don't be high-minded. Caught up with high things all the time. But be carried away with the lowly.

Now, the lowly there could be things, tasks, people. You can't tell in the original language whether it's neuter or masculine. So it's kind of hmm.

What are you going to do with that? And the ESV made the choice people. Associated with the lowly. But it might be lowly stuff.

Here's an illustration of what I think is included here. I think he means in the first two phrases don't be high-minded, be low, come down. I think he means don't think that changing a diaper is beneath you.

Okay, let's talk about diapers. I checked this out with Noelle today. It's just a little interlude.

Give you a window into the Piper home. We had kids in diapers, I figure, for 10 years. Roughly two and a half years each, right? More or less.

And I figure that 365 days in a year, that's 10 times 365, that's 3,650. And I asked Noelle, how many diapers you change a day when you got a kid in that condition? She said newborn or six months or two years? I said, oh, just the average. So we hit upon six.

I had chosen eight. I think six is low, but six. So you multiply six a day times 3,650 and you get around 22,000 diaper changes.

Now, I didn't ask Noelle this, but I'm just going to guess how many of those I did. And then you check with Noelle and see whether my guesses are right. I'm just guessing roughly 20%.

So I figured 20% of 22,000, round it down. So I've changed about 5,000 diapers in my life. And I only point that out to say that's a good thing to do, dads.

That's a good thing to do. You shouldn't say I'm a pastor of this church. I write books.

I don't change diapers. Or let's just broaden it out for single people and others. I don't run errands or I don't type reports or I don't sweep floors.

I don't do tasks that our culture calls menial, simple, lowbrow. I'm above them. I think that's what the first half of verse 16 is talking about.

That is, those two phrases, don't be haughty, associate with the lowly, or more literally, don't be high-minded, come down to lowly tasks, lowly deeds, lowly people. And then that phrase, be carried away, it's called associate with lowly, be carried away with simple, lowly, ordinary, tedious things. Isn't that just a fleshing out of Philippians 2? Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who did not count equality with God a thing to be seized, grasped, held on to, but emptied himself, took the form of a servant and was carried away in lowliness all his life long, hanging out with the people nobody else would hang out with, doing the kinds of deeds, touching lepers, holding little children when the disciples said, tell the children to go away.

And he says, suffer those little children to come to me. And he got upset at his disciples. Jesus went from as high as you can get as God to as low as you can get on a criminal's cross that we might experience two things.

One, forgiveness for all of our pride and the ability to become more like him. That's what he was doing for us when he came. I've got to point out this word.

The word associate with the lowly, literally be carried away with, it's used in two other places in the New Testament. Galatians 2.13, Barnabas was carried away with Peter's hypocrisy. 2 Peter 3.17, the people were carried away with the error of lawlessness.

Be carried away with the lowly tasks, the lowly things, the lowly people. Be carried away with them. Be swept away.

Why did he choose that word? It's an unusual word. It doesn't just mean associate with. It's an unusual word.

It means you're being acted upon. Something's happening to you and you're being drawn. Barnabas, he didn't want to be a hypocrite in Antioch.

He was just sucked into the spirit of the moment. And a lot of people don't want to be sucked into the error of their ways, but he's describing an experience of the Christian life that is not just a cool choice. Well, let's see now.

Shall I today do a lowly thing or shall I today do a high thing? I today will do a lowly thing. It's not the mindset at all. The mindset is, I just love getting down there and helping sweep.

I love to help put chairs away. I love to get the mail and carry it up the steps. Anybody's report I can type.

Anybody got an errand I can run? Wow. May the world be filled with Christians. Real Christians.

We are becoming. We are becoming. May the Lord hasten it.

New creatures, not just new deciders. And the transformation is wonderful, freeing, Christ dependent, Christ exalting, transformation and humility. Leads to something remarkable in verse 17.

Namely, it thinks about what is honorable in the sight of all. If you wonder whether I'm skipping over some phrases, I am. And I'm planning to be in this paragraph for weeks more.

So I'll be back. We got lots of questions to answer. But let's just go here.

Verse 17, middle of the verse. Give thought to what is honorable in the sight of all. When you are freed from yourself, no longer self-preoccupied, self-infatuated, self-exalting, you know one of the things your mind does? As it ponders behavior and relationships, it just starts thinking about what would be beautiful to do? What would be honorable to do? I said beautiful because the word here means morally beautiful.

It's beautiful. A morally beautiful thing is an honorable thing. And so the mind just gets worrying.

How did Paul say it? Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable. If there's any excellence, if there's anything worthy of praise, think about these things. That's what the humble person does without being coerced.

He's just outside himself. He's loving beauty. He's loving to create beauty.

He's loving to see beauty. He's loving to commend beauty. Beauty is drawing this humble person out and he wants to do more of it in the world.

He wants to make it happen in every way he can. He's humble. He's free.

He's Christ-dependent. He has broken free from the lowlands, the misty lowlands of self where the smog settles in and the disease-ridden mist down by the coast gives everybody malaria. He's made his way by faith up into the mountains and he can now see beauty everywhere and he just wants to show it, share it, spread it.

What if it bothers you that he says in the sight of all? It does me. It bothers me. And so I struggled with that.

Give thought to what is honorable in the sight of all. Hmm. So, you're saying fallen sinful human beings become the arbiter of Christian virtue.

If they don't like it, we don't do it. If they like it, we do it. Is that what you're saying? They decide what's honorable.

Sounds like it. There are some clues that's not the case. And you know it's not the case.

You've read the rest of the book. But here is a very close parallel. 2 Corinthians 8.21 where Paul says, we aim at what is honorable.

Same words. We aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but in the sight of all men. There he makes explicit what I think is here implicit.

Namely, we've got two criteria. When you're a humble person and you're depending utterly on God, you're loving His glory, you're banking on His grace, your mind is just whirring out there with His glory and Him and His beauty. And you've got some choices to make about what you're going to do with business and work tomorrow.

Monday. And you take the Lord into account. Lord, what's beautiful? What's beautiful at my office? What would be beautiful behavior so that men may see my, same word, color, beautiful works and give glory to my Father in heaven? Just quoted tonight.

What would that be? And then the humble person also does not delight to offend people. Cocky people who don't give a rip about what others think and just step on them here and there. They're proud.

So, the humble person, the humble Christian is always taking two things into account. God and people. God and people.

We're not eager to offend people. If we must, we will. But it's not our delight.

It's not our desire. We don't go around making enemies. Which now brings us to the last phrase in verse 18.

And I'm almost done with this. You thought this was the title of the sermon. Which it is.

And so I always use my titles erroneously. Because I choose the title before I write the sermon. Let's read verse 18.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. I love Paul's realism. I just love it.

He doesn't fly into the clouds and say, OK, you've all become humble people now. That's a beautiful thing. Everybody that sees it will be happy and there will be peace everywhere you go.

He knows that's not true. And Jesus knew it wasn't true. So, we become Christ-dependent, Christ-exalting.

Our humility inclines us to look for what is honorable with other people as well as with the Lord. We start rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep. We don't repay evil for evil.

We bless those who curse us. And lots of times that makes peace. It really does.

And sometimes it doesn't. Just kind of do the best you can to make peace. You here this morning and tonight, you may be doing the best you can with Christ in your family to make peace with a spouse.

She won't come home. Or a kid. He won't come home.

You may be doing the best you can in your small group and every week it seems to result in tension. You may be doing the best you can in this church and you may be bumping into hostilities. I hope not.

That's why I'm preaching this sermon. You may be doing the best you can in your denomination. You may be doing the best you can in your city and your nation within the limits of truth and the limits of what is honorable with the Lord and people and it isn't happening.

And you're sad about that. A humble person is sad about that. A humble person doesn't say, I don't care.

Jesus said it wouldn't happen. Well, he did say that. He said, Do you think that I have come to bring peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division.

For from now on, one house will be divided. Five. Three against two.

Two against three. But you know what? The person we've been describing from this text, when that happens, they're sad. They're not gleeful about having caused division by believing in Jesus.

And yet it happens. So, the point here is not that peace isn't precious. Peace is precious.

It's just that peace with God through Christ is more precious. Peace with God through Christ given freely by grace is more precious than adjusting the teaching of the gospel to make the family happy. In fact, it will hurt the family in the long run even if it makes them happy if you adjust the teaching of the gospel.

The gospel creates peace with God and the gospel creates lovers of peace who do everything they can within the bounds of what is true and honorable to make peace. And it doesn't always happen. The world that crucified Jesus Christ does not always want the peace that He offers.

So I close by saying I hope that you're not in that category. I hope and pray that you're not in that category of you've described Christianity as turning away from the self and resting in Christ so that I'm no longer self-preoccupied and no longer self-infatuated and no longer self-exalting. And faith is a humbly resting in Christ and that's not where I am.

And if that's true, I would simply in the name of Christ say come on in. Come to Christ. Don't stay in the lowlands where the mists of self produced the malaria of pride and death.

Don't stay there. Just let Jesus draw you out. Yield to Him.

Come on over to Him. He's the mediator. He's the Son of God.

It goes like this. You turn to Christ away from self. Little by little or maybe suddenly God does it in different ways.

We have wonderful testimonies as we baptize people on Wednesday night of how God does it so differently to save sinners which He could do right now in the pew where you're sitting. But it might go like this. You say no, self.

You're not king anymore. I'm not going to let you influence me decisively. I'm going to turn now to Jesus Christ.

Throw myself on His mercy because He died for my sins and I'm going to believe in Him. And God then gradually produces humility. Christ-dependent, Christ-exalting humility.

Then pride begins to die. We're able to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. We begin to think about things that are honorable and beautiful.

We start returning good for evil instead of evil for evil. We start blessing those who curse us. And freedom enters into our lives.

So I encourage you turn from self and trust the Savior. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord lift up His face upon you and give you peace and make you a very, very Christ-exalting, humble and joyful person. And all the people said, Amen. You're dismissed.

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