

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript.

Teaching: Carlon Tschetter
Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: Let's Add A Few More

Transcribed Message
March 5, 2023
Romans 12:16

Quite a few years ago, both in the church we served in Kansas and as Bonnie taught music at Southwest Covenant Schools, she had children's choirs. Part of her children's choir ministry was they would do children's musical productions. I was the sound engineer on many of those occasions, not because of any set of skills that I had, but simply due to nepotism and availability. So I got to hear what probably amounts to hundreds of hours of children's music songs during rehearsals and then again at home when Bonnie would play them repeatedly on the boombox. I have these songs rolling around in my mind and one of them came to mind this week as I was looking at Romans 12:16. I've literally taken part of a song and put it into the form of our big idea this morning. It is simply this. To be great in God's kingdom is to be a servant of all. God tells us why. He tells us that God is the one who resists the proud but He gives grace to the humble.

We've been looking for these past weeks in Romans 12 beginning at verse 9 all the way to verse 15 now, and we have accumulated 16 different commands in this set of verses with regard to how it is that God wants us to live our life. As you look at that, we illustrated it with three concentric circles. It all begins in that 9th verse with how it is that we see ourselves. That's the starting point. Then he moves in verses 10 through 13 to the larger context of a body life within the church, within the body of Christ. Then beginning at verse 14 all the way to the end of the chapter, I think there's a mix of both of those, sometimes speaking very specifically to life within the body and within the church, and other times very much an application for our relationships outside of the church and to the world. But we look at that and we say this is how God intends for us and how He wants to live in our relationships with each other.

By way of a very quick review, let's catch up together what we have seen. I would say to you this morning it only works one way. All of these commands only work one

way. They only work when we realize first of all that apart from Christ I can only operate out of a spirit of pride and self-centeredness. That doesn't mean that somebody who's outside of Christ is incapable of love and kindness and all of those things. It just simply means that before Christ our spiritual condition, being what it is according to Romans 1 and 2, we're just naturally motivated by self-interest and selfishness and pride.

Then we come secondly to realize that it is when we are in Christ that we then are able to operate out of this life-giving power of the Holy Spirit of God. That really takes us from chapter 3 all the way to Chapter 11. He was laying the foundation for all of that when we come to this 12th chapter. You look at that and realize these 16 imperatives that we've looked at to this point in this 12th chapter are all built on that truth of the life-giving power of life in Christ through the Holy Spirit. That's what I think Paul would have us see. We are incapable of carrying out these imperatives, these commands apart from the work of the Holy Spirit. That's why it's again so important that we lay that foundation of the early chapters of Romans. Then as we've seen and I remind you again, a reading of this section in Romans 12-16 reveals that all of these commands seem to be growing more daunting in some respects. You'll have to decide for yourself which is the most challenging to you, which is the most difficult for you to fulfill in your daily relationships. Maybe it will be the one we look at this morning.

Let's look at humility on display, God's antidote to pride. God's antidote to pride truly is a spirit and heart of humility. I say as we began looking at this verse, this is one we've got to get right. This is one we've got to get right. We know that we've got to get it right because that's what God says. God says we have to get this one right. Just this last week going through the Old Testament and New Testament and just looking at verse after verse after verse where God specifically says, not just alludes to because that's a whole other set of verses and stories from the lives of people all through Scripture, but explicitly God says repeatedly that statement that we read in Peter where he says he resists the proud but He gives grace to the humble. God takes this very seriously. Every time Paul calls for unity in the church, and he does it frequently in his letters because it was always a concern. The enemy is always trying to bring division. It was always one of Paul's top priorities to speak about this matter of unity. Every time he would do that he would remind us either explicitly or implicitly that the enemy of unity is

pride and self-centeredness and selfishness. This is a big deal. This is important. We've got to get this right because God tells us that. I have said this before but it's kind of a wake-up call when God specifically says I am going to resist you if you adopt and live in the spirit of pride. He tells us upfront. We're going to be resisted by God, but the humble are those that He welcomes and receives.

Secondly, we know this just because of life experiences that confirm it. We know this because life experiences confirm it. The reality is that every relational conflict, every relational struggle is in some way dealing with and grappling with this matter of pride. Behind all of them, every kind, without exception, when we're in a struggle, when we're in a conflict with somebody else, there's a spirit of pride that is at work. That might be at work. That might be within the home. that might be within the realm of parenting. It might be within the realm of marriage. It might be at school. It might be in the neighborhood. Wherever we have these relationships, that is always the constant of all of them. And just think of the background behind every epistle of the New Testament. Behind every epistle of the New Testament, there is the ethnic struggle of the 1st century between God bringing together Jews and Gentiles, who for centuries had learned to hate each other. God steps in to that and Paul actually tells us it is a mystery. It hadn't been revealed that God was going to do this miraculous thing. He was going to bring together people groups who do not like each other. That same work is going on today. That's the same thing we're to step into. There are so many admonitions that remind us of this truth.

What Paul is going to do in Romans 12:16 is he is going to say step back and take a look at yourself. Take a good hard look at yourself and then you'll be equipped and prepared to look at your relationships with each other. Let's do that now as we look at this second point. this is what getting it right looks like. What does it look like when we're walking in the spirit of humility? Paul is going to give us four imperatives, four commands in this 16th verse. He is going to basically say here is a portrait, a snapshot. Do you want to know what it looks like? This is it right here. Take a look.

First one. Humility is to live in harmony with one another. Humility is to live in harmony with one another. The very first thing we need to say is this is not uniformity. This is not uniformity. This is not a call for all of us to get in lockstep with each other and

sync to the exact same thing about everything. That's not going to work ... unless you all want to agree with me all the time, and that ain't going to happen, is it? This is not a call to uniformity. Whenever we have a call in Scripture to unity, it's not uniformity that God is asking of us. We are all different. We bring great variety to the body of Christ. We have untold stories among this group this morning about your backgrounds and your upbringings and the struggles and the good things and all that has happened in your life. All of those things have obviously impacted us and we look at things differently. It's important when we speak of the essentials of the faith that we do have to have unity. At that point we do have to have agreement. Those are the essentials of the faith. Those things about which we are grounded together. We can't be in harmony together if we're not in harmony for instance about the gospel. We can't be functioning as the body of Christ is to function if we're not Trinitarian in our understanding of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. We just go down the list of doctrines and matters of great importance to our faith at which we do have to be united.

We know this to be the case because when we get to Romans 14, what does Paul do? He takes the whole chapter and talks about disputable things. He talks about things that the Bible hasn't specifically said this is right and this is wrong. Things about which Christians take very different positions in understanding. Paul is going to say of course, that's the case, and so here's how you walk through those things together but they're not the essentials of the faith. On those we must be in agreement.

Let me throw out a true or false question. Are you ready? I want a collective answer. True or false. Christians should be easy to get along with. A slight revision to the question. Are you ready? Christians are easy to get along with. We're in the right place. Let's dive in to Romans 12:16 so we can say both times that's true. It should certainly be true. The Christian should be easy to get along with; after all, He's calling us to a spirit of unity. He is saying to us in every one of these commands of verse 16: Set aside the spirit of pride and self-centeredness and exemplify the life of Christ.

Well what is this then if it's not a call to uniformity? It's a call to equality. Understand what that means. It is a call to equality. We are to see each other as having great value. That's what he's saying here. See each other as having great value and equal value. As we look at each other in the body of Christ, we see each one was made

in the image and likeness of God. We step out from here and go out into the world and I don't care who you encounter, where you encounter them, or the circumstances in which you encounter them, you're looking at somebody, no matter what their station in life might be at that moment, you're looking at somebody who is created in the image and likeness of God. Before God they have great value. Paul right out of the gate says we are to live in harmony with each other, which is to say we are to look at each other and we're to see each other as being equally valuable in the eyes of God.

Now I say to you when we look at that statement for what it's saying and what it literally is to be understood as, it is an absolute frontal assault on cliquishness in the church. It is an absolute assault on the spirit of favoritism in the church. There cannot possibly be a cliquish spirit if we're putting on Romans 12:16 which says I value you just as much as I value my best friend. That doesn't mean we don't have best friends, and we don't have special friends. But it does mean that as we look at each other, we don't look at each other through one lens for somebody that is special and somebody who is not so special. It takes down any thought of forming a little clique just from my group and for ourselves. It tears down the walls of favoritism that we might have toward each other.

Listen. Jot down James chapter 2. You're familiar enough with it. It is a powerful passage. James is addressing this very issue. I'll just summarize it. He said something like this. When a rich person walks into your church and you run to greet them with great enthusiasm, and you bring them down to give them one of the most favored seats (which would be right down here in the front). You bring them right down and you want them to have one of the best seats in the house. Then, he says, a poor person walks in and you can see that because of the way they're dressed. James said you say why don't you go stand over there? Or maybe you could go sit over there and out of the way? James brings a harsh word. Clearly that was happening in the life of the early church. They were learning that in the eyes of God everybody had equal value. They were learning what it meant to walk in the power of the Spirit. They were learning what it meant to look at people and say I value you. you have equal value in my eyes as anybody else. That's what he calls us to. The antidote is a change of mind. It's a change of heart. That's what he's calling us to.

The second command. Humility is the opposite of haughty. That is with an “h”, not an “n”. Not naughty. I said haughty. Although to have a haughty spirit would be to be naughty. The word says it all. I like that translation. Don't be haughty. Don't be high-minded. That is the idea of the word. Don't be high-minded. Don't be arrogant. Don't have a spirit of superiority. Don't be disdainful in your attitudes toward somebody else. Don't be condescending. It's building on that first point to this next one.

If you want to fail in the first admonition to live in harmony, then it's just right here. Have a haughty heart. Have a haughty spirit. That will certainly confirm and affirm that you will not live in harmony with each other. A haughty person is by definition somebody who knows it all. They simply have a know-it-all attitude. That certainly doesn't help build bridges into each other's life. so often a haughty spirit is coupled with self-righteousness. A haughty spirit, high-mindedness lends itself so easily to having a spirit of self-righteousness so that as you look at other people you always somehow manage to come out a little better than they.

There is a group in the New Testament that fits that description to a “t”. who were those people? What were they called? They were called the Pharisees. The Pharisees were that group that was always high-minded. They were always filled with self-righteousness. They always looked down on everybody else. They were always living the godly life better than everybody else, even to the point of looking at the Lord Jesus Christ. The sinless Son of God. They even looked at Jesus and said that we are better than You. such was the spirit of arrogance and pride within them. Today they might be people who are driven completely by social media and putting their name and their faith and their life out in front of everybody all the time, gauging their success by the clicks and the likes and all that goes with that.

We ask what does it look like to be haughty minded? How about this. How about unattractive. How about unappealing. When you think of somebody who's haughty, don't you think of somebody who is largely unattractive and unappealing? They have a haughty and high-mindedness. We think of somebody who lives in a world of conflict. If you're high-minded, if you have an arrogant spirit towards life and towards others, I can almost assure you that your life is one series of conflicts and struggles relationally all day long because you're constantly adopting an attitude of you know better than

everybody else. You have all the answers in every setting to every question as soon as it gets asked. How unattractive is that. How unappealing is that. It's like in marriage. To have a high-minded spirit towards your spouse is to always be in a world of winning and losing. In everything that comes up, somebody's got to win and it probably is you as the one who is bringing this high-mindedness. Somebody's got to lose and they need to be reminded that they've lost. Within the world of parenting, you think of what that looks like to have a high-minded, haughty spirit. It looks like a parent who is never wrong. They're just right in every situation. They don't know how to apologize. Why would they need to? They're right all the time. At work, the coworker who never needs any input from anybody else. They're the one who always has to give input to everybody else. You get the idea that they live a life that is filled with conflict because they view other people as less than equal to themselves. The very opposite of how Paul just started off this verse.

Now look at the third one. We live in harmony first of all. Don't be haughty secondly. Thirdly, humility is to associate with the lowly. It is to associate with the lowly. Verse 16. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty but associate with the lowly. What's in view here when he tells us to associate with the lowly? Obviously, a contrast. How do we know it's a contrast? Because the adversative that introduces this phrase. At this point he's saying it's what I just talked. Don't be haughty minded but instead be this. The one who associates with the lowly.

The exact nature of what he has in mind when he says associate with the lowly isn't told to us. We're interpreting our Bible and we have to decide what is in view when he said associate with the lowly. It can easily be, and the context that probably says this is to be understood as people. Associate with lowly people. That would certainly fit in the context. But he can also be talking about something else. Not only do we associate with the lowly people, but we associate as well with the lowly things of life, just the menial tasks. It can be viewed as either of those and maybe both of those would be appropriate.

We certainly would understand what it would mean to be one who would associate with lowly people. All through our society there are people who are struggling in terms of socioeconomics, or in terms of things that are happening within our culture.

They're on the struggling end of things. We certainly know what that looks like. But it can also be as I said lowly things, menial tasks. Walk in the parking lot and you see trash on the ground. You have two choices. You can walk by it or you can pick it up. You walk around our campus and see trash, you have two choices. You can either walk right by it or you can pick it up and throw it in the trash. Here's what John Murray said about this: "There is to be no aristocracy in the church, no cliques of the wealthy as over against the poor, no pedestals of the unapproachable dignity for those of a higher social economic strata or for those who are in office in the church. How contradictory to all such pretensions is the character of the church's head who said I am meek and lowly in heart."

I would say this. I'm encouraged every time we have an event here at Covenant. We get to the end of an event and I see all of these people just jumping in and doing all kinds of things to clean up and pick up and put away. We just come together. We take on all these menial tasks that have to be done. We don't say we'll leave that for somebody else to do. No, we all jump in together and pretty soon it's done and it's taken care of. What does this look like?

To associate with the lowly. Who does it look like? You know the answer in church. The answer is always Jesus. In this case it is exactly right. The answer is Jesus. Who does this look like? In Matthew chapter 11 Matthew says Jesus was one who associated with the lowly. In fact, He was criticized by the Pharisees who were haughty because He associated with the lowly. Then you get to the end of that chapter, Jesus Himself says come to Me all you who are weak and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, not the yoke of the Pharisees, not the yoke of the religious traditionalists. Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I'm meek and lowly of heart and you'll find rest for your soul. Jesus actually identified Himself in that way.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 26 remember when Paul starts talking about the rich and the mighty and the wise and the noble and he said God has not called many of them. He didn't say any of them, but he said He hasn't called many of them. What God has done and who God has called, Paul said, are people like us. People who are just the common people of the day. God has called us – not many wise, not many noble, not many powerful, not many rich. Thankfully He has called some of them too. Most of us

when we look around and we say who are the lowly. It's us in some regard as well because we are simply those who God has chosen and called.

Just briefly here before we go on to the last one. That phrase, that word "associate with", that literally could be understood as to be carried away with. When he says to associate with the lowly, the idea is to be carried away with. Think about what he is communicating in the choosing of that language. In Galatians chapter 2 verse 13, it says that Peter was carried away with the Judaizers. Remember in that setting in which Peter just simply said he wasn't going to hang with the lowly. He was going to go with the upper folks. Paul had to step in and criticize even a fellow apostle because he wasn't willing to be carried away with the lowly. In this case it was the Gentiles. Peter himself uses that same language in 2 Peter 3 when he says don't be carried away with false teaching. The idea is very graphic. It's to move towards. We are to be carried away with.

Now let me ask you this question. Who is going to be the initiator in this scenario? When he said associate with the lowly, be carried away with the lowly, who would be the initiator? It's not going to be the lowly person. It's going to be you and I. In that setting when we see somebody who maybe is not feeling socially welcomed or comfortable or at ease among us, maybe they are sitting by themselves, maybe they're standing off alone. It doesn't mean they're lowly in some socioeconomic sense. It may mean in this case that they are not feeling like they're a part of the group. In most cases it's not going to be the lowly, it's not going to be the person who is less secure. It's going to be us. Even if we're not secure, we've got the command to do it. Be drawn to, Paul says. Be one who associates with the lowly. Don't wait for somebody else to move towards you, you move towards them.

Then lastly, humility is not to think too highly of oneself. It can't be any stronger than the way he starts off this last part of the 16th verse. For there he says, never be wise in your own sight. Humility lastly is not to think too highly of yourself. He couldn't say it any more strongly than that. Never have this attitude. We often hear and it's certainly good counsel in most situations, don't say never and don't say always. We've heard that many times. Here's an exception. The exception here is don't be one who thinks too highly of oneself. Never be wise in your own estimation.

Interesting thing. When you look at verse 16 there have been three times when Paul has spoken of the need to address something in our mind. We don't see that in the English Standard Version translation that I'm using. You don't see it if you have a New International Version. you do see it if you have the New American Standard and you do see it if you have the Authorized Version. In those latter translations, you see the word "mind" three times. In the ESV we don't see that, but there are three different times in this statement of four imperatives when Paul uses a verb that is taken from the word "mind". It is the word "harmony". The base idea of that word harmony. Something needs to be happening in our mind if we're going to be in harmony with each other. The word haughty has as its root that there's something going on high minded. And then this last one – don't be wise in your own eyes.

Where does that take us? It takes us right back to verse 3. How do you see yourself? What did he say? "For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment each according to the measure of his faith." Where does that take us, when we're thinking? It takes us back to verse 2. "Don't be conformed to this world but be transformed in the renewing of your mind." All of this comes back again to what's going on in our minds. The greatest example of course again is Jesus. It does remind me of the guy who said I'm a self-made man. And his friend said you have relieved God of a great responsibility.

Who is the greatest example of someone who never viewed themselves beyond what they should have? Amazingly, it is the Son of God Himself, who in His perfect humanity put before us this example. John 13. He washes the feet of His disciples – the dirty, smelly feet of His disciples. What does He say at the end of that exercise? That exercise totally offended all of them, that He would do that, that He would stoop that lowly to wash their feet when they knew they were the ones that should be washing His feet. What does He say to them? Now you take turns and you come and wash My feet. Well, if He had, they would have had a fight as to who would be first to wash His feet. Instead, He said, now you wash each other's feet. Jesus puts before us this greatest example of not thinking of ourselves more highly than we should think. My friends, to be

great in God's kingdom means you've got to be the servant of all because God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

What do we take away? The beauty of the church. The beauty of the church is that we're all on the same footing. We're all standing equally before the cross. We're all sinners in need of a Savior. We're all saved by grace. Here is my admonition to myself and to all of us. Leave all of your worldly measures of success at the door and come on in and be a servant to each other. Then take that same heart and that same attitude out into the world and be willing to be a servant to all. The only way we can do that, the only way we can do that is by means of the gospel.

That gospel comes to us and it starts off with some bad news. The bad news is that you and I and everybody else has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We may not like that. We may not want to hear it. That's why we call it bad news, because the bad news is that we've sinned and fallen short of the glory and perfection of a holy God. Sin by definition always brings death and separation, but the good news is what we've already talked about. Jesus came. He lived a perfect life. He died a terrible death and He did so that our sins could be forgiven and that relationship with God could be restored. That separation could be bridged because of what Christ has done.

The offer of salvation this morning is not to join Covenant Community Church. It is not to sign up next time to be baptized. It is not to go through some class. It is not to promise to do good works in your neighborhood for an extended period of time. No, it's not by works of righteousness which we have done, but it is according to His mercy that He has saved us. All we have to do is believe that what God has said about us is true and what God has said about His Son is true. He gives to us the gift of eternal life.

Let's pray. Father God, how grateful we are, how amazed we are at Your amazing grace. Father, I pray that in the power of Your Holy Spirit Covenant Community Church would be living in the light of Romans 12 and especially verse 16, that we would take on the very character of our Savior who came into this world, not to be served but to serve and who gave His life as a ransom for many. We are forever grateful Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We love You. In Jesus's name, amen.