

# Why Christ Became a Servant of the Jews

by John Piper

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of welcoming one another in the church, reflecting Christ's service and love for both Jews and Gentiles for the glory of God.*

**Duration:** 31:09

**Scripture:** Mark 10:45, John 3:36, Romans 14:1, Romans 15:7, 2 Corinthians 1:20, Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 2:19-22, Philippians 2:3-4, Hebrews 13:2, 1 Peter 4:9

**Topics:** "Unity in Christ", "Welcoming Others"

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## Description

John Piper emphasizes that Christ became a servant to the Jews to fulfill God's promises and to demonstrate His truthfulness, urging the church to welcome one another across differences, including ethnicity. He highlights the importance of community and hospitality, encouraging believers to open their hearts and homes to each other for the glory of God. Piper connects the welcoming nature of the church to the example set by Christ, who served both Jews and Gentiles, ultimately leading to the glorification of God for His mercy. The sermon calls for unity and acceptance within the church, transcending cultural and personal barriers.

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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). Let's pray together. Father, I pray now that the devil who is defeated decisively would be put to naught in this room, and that his blinding effects that keep us from seeing the sin-covering blood of Christ as beautiful, keep us from seeing the cross as the wisdom and the power of God, would be taken away.

And that light would come, spiritual light would shine in this room, that people who have been blind all their life would today see. And I pray that this text, especially verses 7 through 9, would come true for our church, that we would welcome one another for the glory of Christ, for the glory of God. In his name I pray.

Amen. Just the way he has done now for all of chapter 14, he does again. You remember how many times he gave a practical behavior to pursue, and then undergirded it or supported it with a big biblical doctrinal argument.

It's just Paul's way. That's what he's doing here. So we're going to make that the structure of our thinking.

We're going to talk about the behavior that he wants Bethlehem to have, the church in Rome and the church here. And we're going to talk about how he supports it in verses 8 and 9. So let's go there first. Verse 7. Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God.

So welcoming, receiving, accepting, loving each other is the practical behavior that he wants us to have toward each other. I think if he were here, he would look us in the eye and say, Bethlehem, cross an aisle, cross the commons, cross the parking lot, cross the city, do whatever you have to do and be a welcoming people. Welcome people into your space.

Welcome them into your life. Welcome them into your homes. Be an open, hospitable, welcoming, receiving, accepting, loving people.

Remember, years ago, there was a woman in our church who left this church because she had her pew staked out and somebody was sitting in it when she came one Sunday. She left the church. This text is to tell us not to be people like that, but to be welcoming.

You want to sit in my pew? Can I sit behind you? Can I talk to you? Can I just love you? And you want to sit where I'm sitting? I'll move. Just come near me because I want to be a welcoming kind of person. Here, the emphasis falls first on the differences that we have between weak and strong, right? Verse 1 talks about the strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak.

So he wants weak and strong. That's people with different conscience issues on food and drink and days to welcome each other. But here in this text that was read all the way through verse 9, something more is emphasized, isn't there? Because he moves seamlessly from the issue of the weak and the strong to the issue of Jew and Gentile.

I want you to see that. Verse 1, we who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak. And so when he talks about not pleasing yourself but pleasing another for their good and having one voice to glorify God, he has in mind the tensions between the weak and the strong.

But when he gets to verse 8, without any hint that he's shifting gears, he says, to support that kind of welcoming, for I tell you, Christ became a servant to the circumcised. You're kind of like, whoa, I thought we were talking about weak and strong here. And now you're talking about Jews.

To show God's truthfulness in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. So he's just moved seamlessly from the weak and the strong to Jew and Gentile to support, welcome each other. So now I just want to make sure that we emphasize this.

In other words, in the church, Lord, let there be at Bethlehem not only the kind of heart that moves toward and welcomes in differences along the lines of conscience issues, days, food, drink, let's get our arms around each other anyway, but also we got this issue of ethnicity stirred in here, right? So let's make sure that we're good at that too, that our hearts are big enough to cross not just the aisle or the commons or the parking lot, but the lines that culture sometimes draws between ethnic groups. Let's be good at that too. On Monday, I was listening to a CD of an interview with a Southern Baptist Seminary president, not Al Mohler.

It's the only one we know. And they asked him about the frequency of pastors moving from church to church. The average is about two and a half years.

And in passing, he said, and I know it must be an overstatement, so don't hear me quoting him as absolute gospel truth. I know when you're being interviewed, if you're like me, you overstate things, right? But it means something that he said. The graduates of our seminary are fired at about once a month for witnessing to black people.

He said that. So you thought this was a 1965 issue, right? So I just want, when I heard that, I said, I'm going to push on this a little bit on Sunday with this Jew and Gentile issue, big mega issues there of tension, not just weak and strong, but ethnicity involved in that, and just want to say, oh, Bethlehem, oh, Bethlehem. Let's be a part of the solution here.

Let's not be a part of that, okay? So the main thing Paul is trying to get the church at Bethlehem, our church, to do here is to have hearts that are welcoming, receiving, warm, move over in the chair, come sit with me, come to my house for lunch, come to our small group, come to our Sunday school class. Do I know you? My name is John. What's your name? Kind of people.

Okay, that's what he's after. Right across the hardest barriers that you can think of. Now, how does he support this? Verses 8 and 9. It's big.

It's biblical. It's doctrinal. It's weighty.

So let me just talk about that for a moment. Don't find yourself among the group of people who say, doctrine doesn't affect my life. Other things affect my life, like being a good example or prayer.

But doctrine, teaching about big biblical things like incarnation and salvation and Gentiles being included in the Jews and getting mercy, all that stuff that Romans seems to be about doesn't affect my life. Don't be among that group. If you're already among that group, ask the Lord to change you.

Because it's an offense to the Bible to say that the way the Bible is structured has no effect on me. That's an offense. You're the one who should change there, not the Bible.

Paul, the inspired apostle, says in verse 7, let's be a welcoming kind of people for the glory of God because... And then he unpacks big, heavy, weighty, glorious doctrinal realities. And evidently, he is of the conviction that unpacking of that support should have an effect on us practically. And if it doesn't, we're the ones who are in trouble here.

We got a problem here, here. So if you're that kind of person that say, I just don't get affected, you need to pray that God would change you because the Bible shapes who we are. We don't shape the Bible.

The Bible exists to shape us, change us, make us think away, feel away. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed in the renewal of your mind that you may prove and approve of the will of God, which is to welcome. It's a mind issue.

And evidently, the way Paul believes that the mind and the heart get shaped over time is when they get filled with glorious biblical truth that pushes out all the wrong ways of thinking and wrong ways of feeling. And a whole world gets built in our brain that is another world than this one. That's the way it's supposed to work.

If it doesn't work for you, pray that God would change you. Many people have grown up in homes where this is never taught, grown up in churches where this was never the assumption. And you're sitting there

and thinking, this doesn't work for me.

Well, you're not God. So don't tell the Bible how to think. Let the Bible begin to shape you.

So that's my aim now, to take the next 10 minutes or so and unpack verses 8 and 9. Now, I'm thinking here, I left out a piece of verse 7, and I want to go back and pick it up because it just entered my head that I wanted to say something about it. At the end there where it says, For the glory of God, welcome one another for the glory of God. I want to stress that for the Apostle Paul, nothing human is an end in itself.

Nothing human is an end in itself. Only God is an end in himself. Everything human is for God's sake.

And therefore, everything human will become more human when it is not treated as an end in itself. And to the degree that you treat something preciously human, and there are many of them during Advent, aren't there? Preciously human to the degree that you treat it as an end in itself, it will become less human. Welcome one another for the glory of God means God has designed human community as a precious human reality that is not an end in itself.

You hear that? It's so clear in verse 7. He has designed this wonderful thing that we love called friendship and community and togetherness and warmth and family and relationships not to be an end in itself. And to the degree that we treat it as an end in itself, it will go bad. But to the degree that we always have, to the glory of God, to the glory of God.

Our small group exists for the glory of God. This church exists for the glory of God. I'm crossing the commons to greet that person for the glory of God.

I'm inviting that person to my house to get to know them for the glory of God. Then the human will flower. It will be all that it was designed to be as beautifully, gloriously, preciously human.

Now, I think what Paul does in verses 8 and 9 is argue for that by saying Christ came to serve the Jews for the glory of God and to serve the Gentiles for the glory of God. I think that's the structure of his argument. So let's look at it.

There are six steps in verses 8 and 9. Six steps of argument. Number one. The Son of God became an incarnate Jew.

The Son of God. God became incarnate as a Jew. Verse 8. For I tell you, Christ became a servant to the circumcised.

Here's the way Paul puts it in Galatians 4.4. When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son born of a woman, born under the law, meaning born a Jew. God sent his son into the world as a Jew. Bethlehem, let us not make light, but rather make much of the reality of the Jewish people.

Have you read? She splashed all over the magazines right now. Anne Rice. Thirty years an atheist vampire novelist.

Twenty-seven vampire novels. She's on World Magazine. She's in Newsweek Magazine.

She's... There's another one I got in the mail. I forget. There she is.

Christianity Today. Because something happened. And she just wrote a novel.

It's all over the bookstores called Christ the Lord. Just published in February or August, I think. Christ the Lord.

And so somebody sent that to me. And at the end of Christ the Lord, there's a 15-page statement of what happened to her that she wrote. So I read that.

And here's what I found. I stumbled upon a mystery without a solution. A mystery so immense that I gave up trying to find an explanation because the whole mystery defied belief.

The mystery was the survival of the Jews. It was this mystery that drew me back to God. That's what Anne Rice, the vampire novelist, says.

So be careful that you not minimize the amazing reality of the Jewish people. Jesus Christ did not become incarnate in the middle of nowhere. It was the climax of 2,000 years of God's loving labor with a people chosen for His name, the Jewish people.

And Christ came as a Jew to be the Messiah of the Jewish people. That's step number one in this argument. Number two, He came as a Jew to serve the Jewish people.

Verse eight again, For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised. He said in Mark 10, 45, The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life for ransom for many. And the main way He served the Jewish people was by dying on the cross.

A ransom. A ransom. I came not to be served, but to serve and give my life as a ransom.

My service primarily is to die for my people. And all who believe in Him. John 3, 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.

Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life. But the wrath of God remains on Him. Jew and Gentile.

Step number three, In coming to serve the Jews, Christ confirmed the promises of God. Verse eight again, For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs. Here's the way Paul says it in 2 Corinthians 1, 20.

All the promises of God are yes, in Christ Jesus. This is why we utter the amen to God for His glory. You ever wonder why you say in Jesus' name amen at the end of every prayer? You should anyway.

It's because when He died, He purchased all the promises that you are banking on when you ask for anything. All the promises of God are yes, in Christ Jesus. Therefore, if you crawl up into Christ Jesus, lay claim to no merit of your own, and ask God for what you need in Christ because He died to buy it, you get it.

You get what you need in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3, 16. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring.

It does not say and to offsprings referring to many, but referring to one and to your offspring, who is Christ. All the promises are to the seed or the offspring, namely Jesus. And He came and He fulfilled the ones He was appointed to fulfill, and He bought and confirmed the rest that we enjoy.

And He did that for the Jewish people. He was a servant to the Jews to confirm the promises. And now here's step number four.

Christ did this promise confirming work to vindicate the truthfulness of God. To vindicate the truthfulness of God. Verse 8 again.

And now we've got all of verse 8 in front of us. For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show, or for the truthfulness, for God's truthfulness. That is, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs.

Paul is telling us that fulfilling the promises was not an end in itself. It was so that God would be known, loved, admired, worshipped, praised, glorified as true. He's a true God.

When He says something, it comes true. Christ became incarnate as a Jew to serve Jews, to fulfill promises so that all Jewish people would say the Father of Jesus Christ is true. That's why He came.

Now do you see the support for verse 7? Welcome one another for the glory of God because Christ became a servant to the Jews for the glory of the truthfulness of God. Christ was motivated that way. You be motivated that way.

Christ laid down His life so that God would be glorified as true. You lay down your life for other people so that God would be glorified. That's argument number one.

Now he turns toward the Gentiles. Step number five. The Gentiles, and that's most of us in this room, the Gentiles have been shown mercy in the way Christ served the Jews.

Now get this, because don't make the mistake of thinking verse 9 has another act behind it than Christ's service of the Jews. Like He came to serve the Jews, verse 8, that they might glorify God for His truthfulness. And He did something else for us so that we would glorify God for His mercy.

Wrong. It's not what it says. It's not built that way.

The verse isn't built that way. Rather, it says He came to serve the Jews and He did it in two ways. He did it so as to glorify God for His truthfulness and that Gentiles would glorify God for His mercy.

By serving the Jews, the Gentiles glorify God for His mercy. How can that be? Christ became a servant to the circumcised to confirm the promises to the patriarchs that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could all remember as though it was yesterday, eight years on Romans? I would love to finish Romans before next March.

That would be eight years we've been on Romans. Because if it was all present to us now, I wouldn't have to say anything at this point. It would just be so clear.

It would be so clear from chapter 4. Right? It would just be so clear from Galatians 3. Why it is that in God sending His Son to serve the Jews, Gentiles get mercy. But that was about five years ago. So let me read you a key verse.

Let's read Galatians 3. 328. There is neither Jew nor Greek, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you Gentiles are Christ's, you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

So everything he did for the Jews, he did for you. Because as we come to the Messiah, Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, we Gentiles, we Johnny-come-latelys in this affair of salvation, we come and we say, can we not have some crumbs from the table as a Syrophenician woman? Can we just eat the crumbs? When we talk like that, he says, come on in. All the way in.

And in me, you are a Jew. The reason the Gentiles are glorifying God for His mercy in verse 9, because Jesus became a servant to the Jews, is because we are Jews. When you are united to the seed of Abraham, you are the seed of Abraham.

And therefore, every promise in the Old Testament is ours in Christ Jesus. All of them. None excluded.

And I know the questions are rising. But we're not going there this morning. But you think on that.

That's step number 5. Gentiles are shown mercy by the way Christ served the Jews. When He died for His people, the issue is, how do we become His people? And the answer is, we trust the seed of Abraham. Jesus Christ.

And become Jews. Finally, number 6. Step 6. We Gentiles receive mercy so that we would glorify God for it. Not even receiving mercy through the blood of Christ, shared as a Jewish Messiah, is an end in itself.

You might think that sometimes. I got mercy! I got mercy! That surely is an end in itself. It isn't.

It says so plainly. That the Gentiles might not just get mercy, but glorify God for the mercy. And now you see a second time the connection with verse 7. Verse 7 is the main point.

Bethlehem, in this Advent season and for the rest of this church's existence, become a welcoming people. Welcome one another across the aisle, across the commons, across the strong and weak barriers and the ethnic barriers. Welcome each other into your homes and into your cars and into your small groups, into your classes.

Welcome each other into your lives, into your pain, into your prayers. Welcome each other to the glory of God. Why? Well, let me unpack some big theology for you, Paul says.

There was an incarnation of God as a Jewish person, so that He could fulfill the promises, confirm the truthfulness of God, so that people would say, God is true, God is glorious. And He did it in such a way so that all of you Gentiles might receive mercy, so that you would be glorifying God for His mercy. And so the structure of the text is very clear.

Welcome each other, Bethlehem, for the glory of God, because Christ did so much by way of example and by way of purchase, so that Jews would glorify God for His truthfulness, Gentiles would glorify God for His mercy, and we would all understand what Christmas is. Why Christmas? Christmas is the Son of God becoming a Jew. Christmas is the Son of God serving the Jews.

Christmas is the Son of God serving the Jews to fulfill promises. Christmas is the Son of God to serve the Jews, becoming a man to serve the Jews, to fulfill the promises, so that we would glorify God for His truthfulness. And Christmas is the spillover from the Jewish people to the Gentiles, because if you belong to Christ, you're part of His people.

Let's pray. Father, I ask that You'd make it true now. I ask that You'd make it true.

Please come and make us that kind of church. Oh, how Your Apostle labors throughout chapter 14 and now 15 to help us not please ourselves, but please each other for our good, for up-building, that with one voice we might glorify the God and Father. One voice, unified in our homes, in our cars, in the same set of chairs, in the commons, welcoming each other.

Lord, would You work this, I pray, as we see more and more of how totally glorious You are. And now may the God of hope fill you with joy and peace in believing that by the power of the Holy Spirit you might abound in hope. And all the people said, Amen.

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