

ROMANS, BUT NOT ROMANISTS

NO. 1113

A SERMON
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“I commend unto you Phebe our sister,
 which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchræa:
 that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints,
 and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you:
 for she has been a succourer of many, and of myself also.
 Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus:
 who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks,
 but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house.
 Salute my wellbeloved Epenetus, who is the first fruits of Achaia unto Christ.
 Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us.
 Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles,
 who also were in Christ before me. Greet Amplias my beloved in the Lord.
 Salute Urbane, our helper in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.
 Salute Apelles approved in Christ. Salute them which are of Aristobulus’ household.
 Salute Herodion my kinsman.
 Greet them that are of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord.
 Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord.
 Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord.
 Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.
 Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them.
 Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them.
 Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.”*

Romans 16:1-16

THIS chapter contains Paul’s loving salutation to the various Christians dwelling at Rome. Remember that it is an inspired passage, although it consists of Christian courtesies addressed to different individuals, yet it was written by an apostle, and written not as an ordinary letter, but as a part of the inspired volume.

Therefore there must be valuable matter in it, and though when we read it, it may appear to be unedifying, there must be edifying matter beneath the surface, because all Scripture is given by inspiration and is meant to benefit us in one way or another.

It shows to us one thing, at any rate, that Paul was of a most affectionate disposition, and that God did not select as the apostle of the Gentiles a man of a coarse, unfeeling, selfish turn of mind. His memory, as well as his heart, must have been in good condition to remember so large a number of names, and these were but a few of his many beloved brethren and spiritual children all over the world whom he mentions by name in his other epistles.

His warm heart, I doubt not, quickened his memory and secured to his remembrance the form, condition, history, character, and name of each one of his friends. He loved them too well to forget them. Christians should love one another and should bear one another’s names upon their hearts, even as the great High Priest wears the names of all His saints upon His jeweled breastplate.

A Christian, because of the love he bears to others, is ever anxious to please by courtesy and desires never to pain by rudeness. Grace makes the servant of God to be in the highest sense, a true gentleman. If we learn nothing more from this passage than the duty of acting lovingly and courteously the one to

the other, we shall be all the better for it, for there is none too much tender consideration and gentle speech among professors at this time.

I. Beyond this, our text is singularly full of instructive matter, as I shall hope to show you. Without preface, let us notice, first, that THIS PASSAGE ILLUSTRATES REMARKABLY THE VARIOUS RELATIONS OF FAMILIES TO THE CHURCH.

Note in the third verse that the apostle says, “Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus.” Here you have a household in which both the father and the mother, or say, the husband and the wife, were joined to the church of God. What a happy circumstance was this! Their influence upon the rest of the household must have been very powerful, for when two loving hearts pull together, they accomplish wonders.

What different associations cluster around the names of “Priscilla and Aquila” from those which are awakened by the words “Ananias and Sapphira”? There we have a husband and a wife conspiring in hypocrisy, and here a wife and a husband united in sincere devotion. Thrice happy are those who are not only joined in marriage, but are one in the Lord Jesus Christ. Such marriages are made in heaven.

This couple appears to have been advanced Christians, for they became instructors of others, and not merely teachers of the ignorant, but teachers of those who already knew much of the Gospel, for they instructed young Apollos—an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures. They taught him the way of God more perfectly and therefore we may be sure were deep-taught Christians themselves.

We must usually look for our spiritual fathers and nursing mothers in those households where husband and wife are walking in the fear of God. They are mutually helpful and therefore grow in grace beyond others.

I do not know why Paul in this case wrote, “Priscilla and Aquila,” thus placing the wife first, for in the Acts we read of them as Aquila and Priscilla. I should not wonder but he put them in order according to quality rather than according to the rule of sex. He named Priscilla first, because she was first in energy of character and attainments in grace.

There is a precedence which, in Christ, is due to the woman when she becomes the leader in devotion and manifests the stronger mind in the things of God. It is well when nature and grace both authorize our saying, “Aquila and Priscilla,” but it is not amiss when grace outruns nature, and we hear of “Priscilla and Aquila.”

Whether the wife be first or second matters little if both are truly the servants of God. Dear husband, is your wife unconverted? Never fail to pray for her. Good sister, have you not yet seen the partner of your joys brought in to be a partaker in grace? Never bow your knee for yourself without mentioning that beloved name before the throne of mercy. Pray unceasingly that your life-companions may be converted to God.

Priscilla and Aquila were tentmakers and were thus of the same trade with the apostle, who for this reason lodged with them at Corinth. They had lived in Rome at one time, but had been obliged to leave owing to a decree of Claudius which banished the Jews from the imperial city. When that decree was no longer carried out, they seem to have gone back to Rome, which from the vast awnings used in the great public buildings, must have afforded a fine sphere for the tent-makers’ craft.

It is very likely that their occupation of tent-making necessitated their having a large room in which to carry on their work and therefore they allowed the Christians to meet in it. Paul spoke of the church that was in their house.

It is a great privilege when a Christian family can accommodate the church of God. It is well when they judge that the parlor will be honored by being used for a prayer meeting and consider that the best room in the house is none too good for the servants of God to meet in. Such a dwelling becomes like the house of Obededom, where the ark of God tarried and left a permanent blessing behind.

To pass on—in the seventh verse, you have another family. “Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.” Now, if I understand this passage aright, we have here a case of two men, perhaps they are both

male names, Andronicus and Junia, or else a husband and wife, or a brother and sister—Andronicus and Junia. But at any rate they represent part of a household, and part of a very remarkable household too, for they were kinsmen of Paul, and they were converted to God before Paul was, which interesting fact slips out quite incidentally.

I have wondered in my own mind whether the conversion of his relatives helped to irritate Paul into his murderous fury against the church of Christ, whether when he saw Andronicus and Junia, his relatives, converted to what he thought to be the superstition of Nazareth—whether that excited in him the desperate animosity which he displayed towards the Lord Jesus Christ.

I may leave that as a matter of question, but I feel certain that the prayers of his two relations followed the young persecutor, and that if you were to look deep into the reason for the conversion of Saul of Tarsus on his way to Damascus, you would find it at the mercy seat in the prayers of Andronicus and Junia, his kinsmen, who were in Christ before him.

This should act as a great encouragement for all of you who desire the salvation of your households. Perhaps you have a relative who is very much opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For that very reason pray the more importunately for him! There is none the less hope for him because of his zealous opposition, for the man is evidently in a thoughtful condition, and the grace of God is able to turn his ignorant zeal to good account when his heart has been enlightened and renewed. There is something to be made out of a man who has enough in him to be opposed to the Gospel—a good sword will make a good plowshare. Out of persecutors God can make apostles.

Nowadays the world swarms with milk-sops of men, who neither believe in the Gospel, nor thoroughly disbelieve it. they are neither for nor against, neither true to God nor the devil. Such men of straw will never be worth their salt even if they should become converted. An out-and-out honest hater of the Gospel is the man who, with one touch of divine grace, may be made into an equally sincere lover of the truth which once he despised.

Pray on, pray hard, pray believingly for your relatives, and you may live to see them occupy the pulpit and preach the faith which now they strive to overturn. It is a happy and hopeful token for good to a family, when a part of the household is joined to the church of God.

Passing on again, we meet with a third family in relation to the church, but in this case the master of the house was not a Christian—I suppose not, from the tenth verse, “Salute them which are of Aristobulus’ household.” Not, “Salute Aristobulus,” no, but they that are of his household.

Why leave Aristobulus out? It is just possible that he was dead, but far more likely that he was unsaved. He was left out of the apostle’s salutation because he had left himself out. He was no believer and therefore there could be no Christian salutation sent to him. Alas for him, the kingdom of God was near to him, yea, in his house and yet he was unblessed by it!

Am I not speaking to a man in this condition? Where are you, Aristobulus? That is not your name, perhaps, but your character is the same as that of this unregenerate Roman, whose family knew the Lord. I might speak in God’s name good words and comfortable words to your wife and to your children, but I cannot so speak to you, Aristobulus!

The Lord sends a message of grace to your dear child, to your beloved wife, but not to you—for you have not given your heart to Him. I will pray for you, and I am happy to know that those of your household who love the Lord are interceding for you both day and night. It is a hopeful connection that you have with the church, though, perhaps, you do not care much about it. Yet be sure of this—the kingdom of God has come nigh unto you.

This fact will involve dreadful responsibility, if it does not lead to your salvation, for if like Capernaum you are exalted to heaven by your privileges, it will be all the more dreadful to be thrust down to hell. It is a sad thing in a family when one is taken and another left.

Oh, bethink you how wretched will be your condition if you continue in unbelief, for when your child is in heaven, and your wife is in heaven, and you see your mother who is there, already, and you yourself are cast far off into hell—you will remember that you were called but refused, were bidden but

would not come. You shut your eyes to the light and would not see. You rejected Christ and perished willfully, a suicide to your own soul.

Another instance of this, and I think a worse one, is to be seen further on in our text where the apostle speaks of the “household of Narcissus,” in the eleventh verse, “Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord.” Now I fancy that Narcissus was the master of the house, and that the converts in the house were his servants or his slaves.

There was a Narcissus in the days of Nero, who was put to death by Nero’s successor. He was Nero’s favorite, and when I have said that, you may conclude that he was a man of no very commendable character. It is said of him that he was extremely rich and that he was as bad as he was rich.

Yet while the halls of the house of Narcissus echoed to blasphemous songs, and while luxurious gluttony, mingled with unbridled licentiousness, made his mansion a very hell, there was a saving salt in the servants’ hall and the slaves’ dormitory. Perhaps under the stairs, in the little place where the slave crept in to sleep, prayer was made unto the living God. And when the master little dreamed of it, the servants about his house sang hymns in praise of one Jesus Christ, the anointed Savior, whom they adored as the Son of God.

Wonderful are the ways of electing love, which passes by the rich and great to have respect unto the man of low degree. It may be there is some bad master within reach of my voice. He is himself utterly irreligious, but yet in his house there are those who wait upon the Lord in prayer. He who blacks your shoes may be one of the beloved of the Lord, while you who wear them may be without God and without hope in the world. The little maid in your house fears the Lord, though you are forgetful of His praises. An angel received unawares waits upon you at table.

There was a good man, some years ago, who used to sit up for a certain king of ours of wretched memory—let his name rot! This king was called a gentleman, but other titles might better describe him. And while his master would be rioting, this man was communing with God and reading Boston’s, “Crook in the Lot,” or some such blessed book, to while away the weary hours.

There are still at this day in the halls of the great and wicked, and in the abodes of transgressors of all classes, God’s hidden ones who are the salt of the earth, and cry unto God day and night against the iniquity of their masters. There shall be an inquisition concerning all this—the godly shall not always be forgotten, the golden nuggets shall not always lie hidden in the dust.

Bethink you, O masters, how will it fare with you when your humblest menials shall be crowned with glory and you shall be driven into the blackness of darkness forever. Seek you also the Lord, you great ones and He will be found of you.

We cannot afford to stay with Narcissus, let us turn to the twelfth verse, and you have another instance of a family in connection with Christ’s people. “Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord.” I suppose two sisters, the names sound very like it. Where were their brothers? Where was their father? Where was their mother?

“Tryphena and Tryphosa,” how often have I seen them in the church, two humble, earnest, faithful women—the lone ones of the family, and all the rest far off from God! O brother, let not your sister go to heaven alone. Father, if your daughters be children of God, do not remain His enemy. Let the examples of your godly children help you, O parents, to be yourselves decided for the Redeemer!

Hail to you, you gracious women who keep each other company on the road to heaven! The Lord make you a comfort to one another. May you shine both here and hereafter like twin stars, shedding a gentle radiance of holiness on all around. There is work for you in your heavenly Father’s house, and though you may not be called to public preaching, yet, in spheres appropriate, you may with much acceptance “labour in the Lord.”

Further down, in the fifteenth verse, we have a brother and his sister, “Nereus, and his sister.” It is pleasant to see the stronger and weaker sex thus associated. “They grew in beauty side by side” in the field of nature, and now they bloom together in the garden of grace. It is a sweet relationship, that of a

godly brother and sister. They are as the rose and the lily in the same posy, but had they no other relatives?

Were there no others remaining of their kindred? Had they no trouble in spirit concerning others dear to them? Depend upon it, they often prayed together and sighed because their relatives were not in Christ, for concerning all the rest of the family the record is blank. God hear your prayers, my dear friends, when you, like Nereus and his sister, unite in brotherly prayer and sisterly intercession.

One other very beautiful instance of a family connection with the church is in the thirteenth verse, "Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine." Now, this is a case of a mother and her son. I would not wish to say anything that is far-fetched, but I think there is no vain conjecture in supposing that this good woman was the wife of Simon the Cyrenian, who carried the cross of Christ.

You will remember he is said by Mark to be the father of Alexander and Rufus, two persons who evidently were well-known in the church of God at that time. And here we have familiar mention of Rufus and his mother. Whether she was the wife of Simeon or not, she seems to have been a kind, good, lovable soul, one of those dear matrons who are at once an ornament and a comfort to the Christian church. And such an excellent woman was she that Paul, when he calls her the mother of Rufus adds, "and mine"—she had been like a mother to him.

I do not wonder that such choice mothers have choice sons—"chosen in the Lord." If those whom we deeply love carry their religion about with them set in a frame of affectionate cheerfulness, it is hard to resist the charms of their lovely piety. When a godly woman is a tender mother, it is no wonder if her sons, Rufus and Alexander, become believers in Jesus Christ too, for their mother's love and example draw them towards Jesus.

There is a legend connected with Rufus and Alexander. I have never read it, but I have seen it set forth in glowing colors by an artist in a cathedral in Belgium. I saw a series of paintings which represented Christ bearing His cross through the streets of Jerusalem, and among the crowd the artist has placed a countryman looking on, and carrying with him his mattock and spade, as if he had just come into the town from laboring in the fields.

In the next picture this countryman is evidently moved to tears by seeing the cruelties practiced upon the Redeemer, and he shows his sympathy so plainly that the cruel persecutors of our Lord, who are watching the spectators, observe it and gather angrily around him. The countryman's two boys are there too—Alexander and Rufus.

Rufus is the boy with the red hair. He is ardent and sanguine, bold and outspoken, and you can see that one of the rough men has just been cuffing him about the head for showing sympathy with the poor cross-bearing Savior.

The next picture represents the father taken and compelled to bear the cross, while Alexander holds his father's pick and Rufus is carrying his father's spade, and they are going along close by the Lord Jesus, pitying Him greatly. If they cannot bear the cross, they will at least help their father by carrying his tools.

Of course, it is but a legend, but who marvels if Alexander and Rufus saw their father carry Christ's cross so well that they, too, should afterwards count it their glory to be followers of the Crucified One, so that Paul should say, when he wrote down the name of Rufus, that he was a choice man, for so we may translate the passage, "chosen in the Lord," or "the choice one of the Lord." He was a distinguished Christian with great depth of Christian experience, and in all respects a fit descendant of a remarkable father and mother.

Thus have we observed the different ways in which families come in contact with Christ, and I pray God that every family here may make up a part of the whole family in heaven and earth, which is named by the name of Jesus. May all your sons and your daughters, your brethren and your sisters, your servants and kinsfolk, but chiefly yourselves, take up the cross of Jesus, and be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation.

II. The interesting passage before us shows WHAT ARE POINTS OF INTEREST AMONG CHRISTIANS.

Now, among worldly people, points of interest are very many and characteristic. In any worldly community one very important point of interest is, how much is a man worth? That is an important point with Christians, too, in the right sense, but the worldly man means by that, “How much money has the man scraped into his till?”

He may have gained his riches in the worst way in the world, but nobody takes account of that. The one all-important question among Mammonites is—“What is his balance at the bankers?” Now Paul does not in his salutation make a single reference to anyone on account of his wealth or poverty. He does not say, “To Philologus, our brother, who has ten thousand pounds a year, and Julia, our sister, who keeps a carriage and pair”—nothing of the sort. He makes no account of position or property, except so far as those may be implied in the service which each person rendered to *the cause of God*.

Neither is there any allusion made to their holding important offices under government, or being what is called exceedingly respectable people or persons of good family. The points of interest with Paul, as a Christian, were very different from those.

The first matter of which he made honorable mention was their service for the church. Phebe, in the first verse, is “a servant of the church, which is at Cenchrea. She hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.” It is a distinction and honor among Christians to be allowed to serve and the most menial employment for the church of God is the most honorable.

Every man who seeks honor after God’s fashion seeks it by being abased, by undertaking that ministry which will involve the most self-denial, and will secure the greatest reproach. Foremost in the ranks of the divine peerage are the martyrs, because they were the most despised. They suffered most and they have the most of honor.

So Phebe shall have her name inscribed in this golden book of Christ’s nobility, because she is the servant of the church, and because, in being such, she succored the poor and needy. I doubt not she was a nurse among the poorer Christians, or as some call them, a deaconess, for in olden time, it was so, that the elder women who had need were maintained by the church, and in return, occupied themselves with the nursing of sick believers. And it were be well if such were the case again, and if the old office could be revived.

Another special point for remark among Christians is their labor. Kindly refer to your Bibles and read the sixth verse, “Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us.” This is the sixth Mary mentioned in the Bible. She appears to have been one who laid herself out to help the minister. “She bestowed much labour *on us*,” says the apostle, or “on me”—she was one of those useful women who took personal care of the preacher, because she believed the life of God’s servant to be precious, and that he should be cared for in his many labors and perils.

What she did for Paul and his fellow laborers, we are not told, but it was something which cost her effort, amounting to “much labour.” She loved much and therefore toiled much. She was “always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Sister Mary, imitate your namesake.

Then follow the two good women, Tryphena and Tryphosa, of whom it is said, “Who labour in the Lord,” and Persis, of whom it is written, she “laboured *much* in the Lord.” I do not suppose Tryphena and Tryphosa were angry because the apostle made this distinction, but it is certainly a very plain and explicit one—the first two “laboured”—but Persis “labored much.”

So there are distinctions and degrees in honor among believers and these are graduated by the scale of service done. It is an honor to labor for Christ. It is a still greater honor to labor much. If, then, any, in joining the Christian church, desire place or position, honor or respect, the way to it is this—labor and labor much.

Persis had probably been a slave and was of a strange race from the far-off land of Persia, but she was so excellent in disposition that she is called, “the beloved Persis,” and for her indefatigable industry she receives signal mention. Among believers the rewards of affectionate respect are distributed

according to the self-denying service which is rendered to Christ, and to His cause. May all of us be helped to labor much, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

At the same time, another point of interest is *character*, for as I have already said, Rufus in the thirteenth verse is said to be “chosen in the Lord,” which cannot allude to his election, since all the rest were chosen too, but must mean that he was a choice man in the Lord, a man of peculiarly sweet spirit, a devout man, a man who walked with God, a man well-instructed in the things of God, and a man whose practice was equal to his knowledge.

“Salute” him, says the apostle. He who would be noted in the church of God must have real character—there must be holiness unto the Lord, there must be faith. A man must have it said of him, “He is full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.” This shall get him commemoration, but nothing else will do it.

Apelles is described as “approved in Christ,” a tried, proved, and experienced believer. Christians value those who have been tested and found faithful. Tried saints are had in honor among us. Character, you see, is the one noteworthy point in the society of the church and nothing else.

Yes, there is one thing else. I find one person here noted in the church as a person around whom great interest centered, because of the time of his conversion. It is in the fifth verse, “Salute my well-beloved Epenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ.” You know what that means. When Paul began to preach in Achaia, Epaenetus was one of his first converts, and while every minister feels a peculiar attachment to all his converts, he has the tenderest memory of the first ones. What parent does not prize above all others his first child?

I can speak from experience. I remember well the first woman who professed to be brought to Christ when I began to preach the Gospel. I have the house in my mind’s eye at this moment. and though I cannot say that it was a picturesque cottage, yet it will always interest me. Great was the joy I felt when I heard that peasant’s story of repentance and of faith.

She died and went to heaven a short time after her conversion, being taken away by consumption, but the remembrance of her gave me more comfort than I have ordinarily received by the recollection of twenty or even a hundred converts since then. She was a precious seal set upon my ministry to begin with and to encourage my infant faith.

Some of you were the first fruits of my ministry in London, in Park Street, and very precious people you were. How gladly would I see some of you in this Tabernacle become the first fruits of this present year—there would be something very interesting about you, for it would encourage us all through the year.

If you are brought to seek the Lord just now, I shall always view you with love and think of you as I read this chapter so full of names. I shall be as thankful for those born to God tonight as for those regenerated at any other time, for my heart is earnestly going out after you.

So I have shown you that there are points of interest about individual persons in the church of God and what they are.

III. But as time has fled, though I have much to say, I must close with the third point, which is this. This long passage REVEALS THE GENERAL LOVE WHICH EXISTS (must I say which ought to exist?) IN THE CHURCH OF GOD.

For, first, the whole passage shows the love of the apostle towards the saints and brethren at Rome. He would not have taken the trouble to write all this to them if he had not really loved them. And it shows that there were Christians in those days who were full of love to each other. Their salutation, the holy kiss, marked their fervor of love, for they were by no means a people given to use outward signs unless they had something to express thereby.

O that Christian love reigned among all Christians to a greater extent! “Ah!” says one, “there is very little of it.” I know you, my friend, very well indeed. You are the man who is forever grumbling at others for want of love, when the truth is that you are destitute of it yourself. I always find that those

who say there is no love among Christians now, judge by what they see at home in their own hearts—for those who love Christians believe that Christians also love one another.

And you shall find the man of a loving heart, though he will say, “I wish that there were more love,” will never be the man to say that there is none. Brethren, it is a lie that there is no love among Christians. We love each other still and we will show it, by the grace of God even more, if the Spirit of God shall help us.

Note according to this passage the early Christians were accustomed to show their love to one another by practical help. For in the second verse, Paul says of Phebe, “Receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and assist her in whatever business she hath need of you, for she has been a succourer of many, and of myself also.”

I do not think that the apostle alluded to any church business, but to her own business, whatever that may have been. She may have had moneys to gather in, or some complaint to make at headquarters of an exacting tax-gatherer. I do not know what it was and it is quite as well that Paul did not tell us. It is no part of an apostle’s commission to tell us other people’s business.

But whatever business it was, if any Christian in Rome could help her he was to do so. And so if we can help our Christian brethren in any way or shape, as much as lies in us we are to endeavor to do it. Our love must not lie in words alone or it will be unsubstantial as the air.

Mark you, you are not called upon to become sureties for your brethren, or to put your name on the back of bills for them—do that for nobody, for you have an express word in Scripture against it, “He that hateth suretyship is sure,” says Solomon, and “He that is a surety shall smart for it.” I could wish that some brethren had been wise enough to have recollected the teaching of Scripture upon that point, for it might have saved them a sea of troubles.

But for your fellow Christians do anything that is lawful for you to do. Do it for one another out of love to your common Lord, bearing one another’s burdens, and so fulfilling the law of Christ.

We are bound to show our love to each other, even when it involves great sacrifices. In the fourth verse, the apostle says of Priscilla and Aquila that for his life, “they laid down their own necks.” They went into great peril to save the apostle. Such love still exists in our churches. This is denied, but I know it is so.

I know Christians who could say honestly that if their minister’s life could be spared, they would be willing to die in his stead. It has been said by some here, and I have heard it, and have felt that they who said it meant what they said. Nay, I know the prayer has gone up from some lips here that they might sooner die than I should.

When your pastor has been in danger, many of you have lovingly declared that if your life could stand for his life, it should be freely rendered before God. Christians love each other still, and they make sacrifices for one another still. I speak this to the honor of many of you, that your love to your pastor has not been in word only, but in deed and in truth, and for this may the Lord reward you.

Christian love in those days had an intense respect for those who had suffered for Christ. Read the seventh verse. Paul says that Andronicus and Junia were his fellow prisoners, and he speaks of them with special unction because of that. No one was thought more of among the early Christians than the prisoner for Christ, the martyr or the almost martyr.

Why, there was even too much made of such sufferers, so that while Christians were in prison, expecting to be martyred, they received attentions which showed almost too great a reverence for their persons.

Now, brethren, whenever any man in these times is laughed at for fully following Christ, or ridiculed for bearing an honest testimony for the truth, do not be ashamed of him and turn your backs upon him. Such a man may not expect you to give him double honor, but he may claim that you shall stand shoulder to shoulder with him, and not be ashamed of the reproach which he is called to bear for Christ his Lord.

So was it with the church in the olden time—the men who went first in suffering were also first in their love and esteem. They never failed to admit that they were brothers to the man who was doomed to die. On the contrary, the Christians of the apostolic times used to do what our Protestant forefathers did in England.

The young Christian people of the church, when there was a martyr to be put to death, would go and stand with tears in their eyes to see him die—and what think you for? *To learn the way!* One of them said, when his father asked him why he stole out to see his pastor burned, “Father, I did it that I might learn the way.” And he did learn it so well that when his turn came he burned as well and triumphed in God as gloriously as his minister had done.

Learn the way, young man, to bear reproach. Look at those who have been lampooned and satirized, and say, “Well, I will learn how to take my turn when my turn comes, but as God helps me, I will speak for the truth faithfully and boldly.”

Again, that love always honored workers. For Paul says, “Mary, who bestowed much labour on us.” And he speaks of the laborers over and over again with intense affection. We ought to love much those who do much for Christ, whether they are Christian men or women. Alas, I know some who, if anybody does a little more than another, straightway begin to pick holes in his coat.

“Mr. So and so is very earnest, but—ah—yes! And Mrs. So and so, yes—God blesses her, but—but—yes” For want of anything definite to say, they shrug their shoulders and insinuate. This is the reverse of the spirit of Paul, for he recognized holy industry and praised it.

Dear friend, do not become a fault-finder—it is as bad a trade as a pickpocket’s. Till you can do better, hold your tongue! Did you ever know a man or woman whom God blessed that was perfect? If God were to work by perfect instruments, the instruments would earn a part of the glory. Take it for granted that we are all imperfect—but when you have taken that for granted, love those who serve God well, and never allow anybody to speak against them in your hearing. Silence cavilers at once by saying, “God honors them, and whom God honors, I dare not despise!” We cannot be wrong in putting our honor where God is pleased to place His.

Still, Christian love in Paul’s days—though it loved all the saints—had its specialties. Read down the chapter and you will find Paul saying, “My well-beloved Epenetus,” “Amplias, my beloved in the Lord,” “Stachys my beloved,” and “Urbane our helper in Christ.” All these were persons whom he especially esteemed.

There were some whom he liked better than others, and you must not blame yourself if you judge some Christians to be better than others. and if you therefore love them better, for even the Lord Himself had a disciple whom He loved more than the rest.

I desire to love all the Lord’s people, but there are some of them whom I can love best while I know the least about them, and feel the most comfort in them when I have not seen them for a month or so. There are Christian people whom you could live with in heaven comfortably enough, but it is a severe trial to bear with them on earth, although you feel that they are good people—and since God puts up with them, so ought you.

Since there are such peculiar people, do not be always getting in their way to irritate them—leave them alone and seek peace by keeping out of their way. Brethren let us love one another. By all means let us love one another, for love is of God. But let us all try to be loveable, so as to make this duty as easy as possible for our brethren.

Once more, love among Christians in those early days was wont to respect seniority in spiritual life, for Paul speaks of some who were in Christ before himself. Among us I hope there will always be profound esteem for those who have been longest in Christ, for those who have stood the test of years, for our aged members, the elders and the matrons among us. Reverence to old age is but a natural duty, but reverence to advanced Christians is a privilege as well. Let it always be so among us.

And the last word is this—love to all Christians should make us recollect even the most obscure and mean members of the church. When the apostle Paul wrote, “Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas,” why,

many of us say, “Whoever were these good people?” And when he goes on to mention, “Patrobas, Hermes,” we ask, “And who were they? What did these men attempt or perform? Is that all? Philologus, who was he? And who was Olympas? We know next to nothing about those good people.”

They were like the most of us, commonplace individuals, but they loved the Lord, and therefore as Paul recollected their names, he sent them a message of love which has become embalmed in the Holy Scriptures. Do not let us think of the distinguished Christians exclusively so as to forget the rank and file of the Lord’s army. Do not let the eye rest exclusively upon the front rank, but let us love all whom Christ loves.

Let us value all Christ’s servants. It is better to be God’s dog than to be the devil’s darling. It were better to be the meanest Christian than to be the greatest sinner. If Christ is in them, and they are in Christ, and you are a Christian, let your heart go out towards them.

And now, finally, may grace, mercy, and peace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ, and may we labor to promote unity and love among His people. The God of peace shall bruise Satan under our feet shortly, may we therefore in patience possess our souls.

O that those who are not yet numbered among the people of the Lord may be brought in through faith in Jesus Christ to His glory! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ROMANS 16

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.