

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

TITLES OF HONOUR.

A Sermon

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"Brethren beloved of the Lord."—2 Thessalonians ii. 13.

THE verse from which my text is taken begins thus, "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord," so I will commence my discourse by saying that we might often find comfort and relief from gloomy apprehensions by associating with those who are "beloved of the Lord." If you read the chapter through, you will perceive that Paul's mind was greatly exercised concerning the perilous times which were to come to the Church of Christ. He wrote to warn the Thessalonians concerning the coming of antichrist, and then said that there were some to whom God would send "strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." The apostle's heart was so heavily burdened with that sorrowful theme that he was glad to turn his pen to quite a different subject, and therefore he wrote, "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for *you*, brethren beloved of the Lord." Just now, there is a general opinion that the growth of Popery in this land is most alarming, and that the declension of vital godliness is very serious; and while we do not fully agree with the alarmists, we are obliged to admit that these are times of peculiar peril. The tendency of those who look only at the black side of the question is to fret and worry, and to feel that God's Church is in danger. Brethren, I would not have you shut your eyes to the dangers by which we are surrounded, but I would not have you dispirited by them. There are still many saints left in the world; there are still some who, like those

in Sardis, have not defiled their garments; there are still some who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth; there are still many earnest and faithful testifiers to the truth as it is in Jesus; so, although you may mourn over the evils of the times, you are bound to give thanks always to God that there are some "brethren beloved of the Lord" still left upon the face of the earth. David spoke of the saints that were on the earth in his day as "the excellent, in whom is all my delight;" and David's Lord, our blessed Master, no doubt found no small solace, as a man, in associating with Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus, for he seems to have withdrawn from the multitude who mocked and scoffed, and to have retired into the privacy of domestic piety, and there to have found joy and comfort in the midst of the happy family that was so closely attached to him. There are still in the world many of the precious sons of Zion who are comparable to fine gold, and concerning whom the Lord says, "They shall be mine in that day, when I make up my jewels." Be wise, my brethren, and let it be said of you as it was said of them of old, "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another," for there is comfort to be found in the society of God's saints, let the times be never so perilous and dark.

But I would advance a step beyond this preliminary observation, and remark that, when things are outwardly not as the children of God would like them to be, and when there is much within them that is not as it should be, they may often derive much solace by reflecting upon their true condition in the sight of God in connection with the Lord Jesus Christ. Brethren and sisters in Christ, I know that many of you have grievous trials to endure; and I am well aware that, if you look within, you will see much that will distress you. You will perceive that the old Adam still lurks within you, and that notwithstanding all the force that has been brought against him by divine grace, he is still far too vigorous. It is true that some of you have also to suffer from poverty, and that your lot is a very hard one; yet we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, and you are yourselves bound to give thanks on your own behalf because, notwithstanding your poverty, and notwithstanding your infirmity, and notwithstanding even the sin of which you have such cause to mourn, you are still "beloved of the Lord," and in the person of Jesus Christ you are "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. When faith recognizes the vital union which exists between Christ and the soul, and realizes the consequent blessedness and security of the saint, then it cries, "I am bound to give thanks alway unto God, for I am still beloved of the Lord notwithstanding all that causes me often to weep and mourn."

It is my purpose, this evening, to invite all of you who are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ to contemplate your true standing in the sight of God, that you may be uplifted from the dunghills of your complainings, shake off the ashes of your doubts, unwind the sackcloth of your fears, put on your beautiful garments of holy

rejoicing, and sing aloud unto him through whose grace you are made worthy to be called "brethren beloved of the Lord." There are two topics on which I have to speak; first, *the titles mentioned in the text*; and, secondly, *the wearers of those titles*.

I. First, then, let us think for a while of THE TITLES MENTIONED IN THE TEXT: "Brethren" and "beloved of the Lord."

"Brethren" is a very special word, the utterance of it awakens an echo in every believer's heart. It is naturally a silver word, but spiritually God has transmuted it into gold. I do not wonder that a certain sect has appropriated this title, yet we equally claim the name of "brethren" as our own, and we share it with all who are the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. The title "brethren" is very hallowed and very precious to us; let us try to find out what it implies.

First, it indicates a common nature. Whatever opinions any may hold concerning the unity of the human race, there can be no difference of opinion about the unity of nature in those who are born of the same parents. Where should I expect to find a person more in sympathy with myself than my own brother? Where should I expect to find, beneath the cope of heaven, another soul that should be more akin to mine than the soul of my brother? If there be not peace and love between us, where can they be found? However much we may differ from one another in some respects, there must be certain lineaments of feature or traits of character in which we are alike. But even if this is not so naturally, it certainly is so spiritually. All believers are alike partakers of the divine nature; we are all equally begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The inner life of all true Christians is the same; there is not a Baptist life and a Methodist life, or a Nonconformist life and a Church of England life. The divine life is one wherever it is bestowed. The life of my hand and the life of my foot are one and the same, pulsating from the same central source, and maintained by the same power; and the life of God is the same in all the members of the mystical body of Christ. This is something more than brotherhood; that idea does not cover the whole truth although it includes much of it. There is a distinct unity of nature in all the saints of the living God. Hence, brethren, I never can tolerate any attempts to limit communion between those who are really one in Christ. It always seems to me that it would be an infraction of the divine law if I were to say to a brother in Christ that I could not commune with him because of certain minor matters in which we do not quite agree. Besides, whether I am willing to do so or not, I cannot help communing with him, for he is a part of Christ's mystical body of which I also am a part; so that, unless I could myself get out of that body, or he could get out of it, which is impossible for either of us, I must remain in spiritual communion with him whatever I may do concerning the outward and visible symbols of that communion. Nay, more than that, if I could go

to heaven, and that brother still tarried here upon the earth, our communion would not be broken, for Dr. Watts was right when he sang,—

“The saints on earth, and all the dead,
But one communion make;
All join in Christ, their living Head,
And of his grace partake.”

The term “brethren” also implies a common experience. The brethren in an earthly family have the same parents, they live in the same house, they partake of the same food, they share all the privileges and varied experiences of the same household. So is it with those who are of the household of faith, the family of God. Their experiences may vary even as one child in the home differs from another, but there is much more similarity than there is diversity in the experiences of the living children of the living God. We have all been broken in pieces, we have all been bound up, we have all been emptied, we have all been brought to the cross, we have all been led by one Spirit to drink of the same precious truth. We have not all subscribed to the same creed, yet in substance and in effect the doctrine of all the children of God is to a large extent identical. They rely for salvation upon the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and therein they are all one. Their pilgrim path is through the same wilderness, they eat the same manna, they drink of the same Rock, they are led by the same cloudy-fiery pillar, and they come at last to the same heavenly Canaan, and go no more out for ever. They are and they must be one, not only because they are one in nature, but because the various processes through which that nature has to pass are so largely the same.

More than this, the title “brethren” implies that we love one another. It is said that there is a lack of love in certain churches that profess to be Christian. Well, perhaps there is; I am not going to be an accuser of the brethren in that respect; but I believe there is a great deal more love existing among Christians than many persons imagine. Possibly, those who say there is a lack of love in our midst judge by the state of their own hearts, while those who really love the saints find that the saints also love them. Do not suppose, dear friends, because the preacher has sometimes to proclaim very unpalatable truths, and because he sometimes delivers his message in stern tones, that therefore he has not a tender heart. Fidelity to the truth requires that it should be spoken in such a fashion as to secure public attention, and this involves the use of great plainness of speech, and a manner of delivery which some may resent; and the man who honestly and fearlessly acts thus is more acceptable to God, and has far greater and truer love in his heart than the one who says, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace. As I hate Satan and all his works, so my soul hates every false doctrine in this church and in every church; but as I love

God and all that God loves, so am I desirous to love every child of the loving God; and I will further say that, not only do I desire to love every child of God, but I think I really do so. Do you not feel, beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, whenever you meet a believer in Jesus, and begin to talk of the things that belong to his kingdom, you have fellowship with him in heart and spirit even though you had never seen him before? When we talk of Jesus, our love to one another soon begins to flow. The true basis of our communion with one another is that we are one in Christ Jesus, and that union manifests itself in love to all who are, as our text puts it, "brethren beloved of the Lord."

This word "brethren" is a far-reaching word, for it further implies that all Christians have a common Father. Let all believers rejoice that they can unite in saying, "Our Father, who art in heaven." There is a straight line from my heart to the heart of God, and so there is from your heart, my brother or my sister in Christ, so our Father's heart is our common meeting place. We were there in purpose before this world was created, we are there by faith at this moment, and we shall be there by blessed experience when this world has passed away, and time shall be no more. Having the same Father, we share equally in that Father's love. We may not always feel the same love to all our brethren and sisters in Christ, but God's love to us and his love to them knows no variation. I trust you all realize that our Father is quite impartial in his love to all his children, and that all who are truly members of his family through their union to Christ shall have an equal share of it. Hence the tie of Christian brotherhood becomes a very solemn and a very precious thing, for it not only binds us fast to our Father in heaven, but it also binds us closely to one another. I pray that the members of this church may always act toward each other as brethren in Christ. I wish that amongst all the saints there might be a sort of spiritual freemasonry so that, whenever we might meet, we should recognize one another by the holy grip of Christian love. There are certain sacred passwords that are common to all the saints, and I will defy the hypocrite or the worldling to pronounce them aright; or if he should be able to utter them with his lips, he can never really know their meaning in his heart. There are certain experiences that cannot be learned without the teaching of the Holy Spirit. There is a certain way of speaking about Christ that can never be acquired as a parrot learns to talk. There is a certain ring which God gives to his gold which is never bestowed upon baser metal, and there is a certain something about a true child of God which enables him to recognize others of the same family, and which also enables them to recognize him; so that, when they come together, their hearts leap up at the thought that they are "brethren beloved of the Lord."

Perhaps I have lingered too long over that first title, so now I must turn to the second one, "*beloved of the Lord.*" You do not

need my explanations here, for the Holy Spirit inspired the apostle to give the divine explanation of this title of honour. Turn to the verse from which our text is taken, and you will see that the first thought concerning the Lord's love to you is that of its antiquity: "We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you." You always were "beloved of the Lord." He did not begin to love you when you first repented and turned to him. He saw you in the glass of his eternal purpose, and he loved you then. That love he proved many centuries before you knew anything about it, for his beloved Son, Jesus Christ your Lord and Saviour, had redeemed you eighteen hundred years before you were born; he gave the fullest proof of his affection for you in laying down his life for you. There was nothing in you to merit this wondrous self-sacrifice on the part of Christ; on the contrary, you were his enemies, you profaned his holy name, and despised his sacrifice after you learned what he had done. But he gave himself for you because from eternity he had loved you with a love that would not be turned from its purpose by anything that he foresaw would be done by you.

In addition to the antiquity of the Lord's love to you, think also of its richness. The apostle says, "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation." Have you grasped the full meaning of that word salvation, beloved? It does not merely mean salvation from hell, though that is included in it; but it means salvation from sin, salvation from the guilt and power of sin, salvation from your doubts, your fears, your troubles, salvation from that besetting infirmity of yours, salvation from the devil's dominion over you, salvation in all its fulness from first to last. To all this "God hath from the beginning chosen you" who are "brethren beloved of the Lord." This is no mean inheritance, no slender portion, no slight boon; indeed, it is not easy to find words in which adequately to describe all that God has done for you in choosing you "to salvation." It will need all eternity to fully explain the meaning of that great word. You are indeed "beloved of the Lord" in having such a priceless portion as this bestowed upon you.

Notice, next, the wisdom of the Lord's love to you: "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." Had it been possible for you to have had salvation without sanctification, it would have been a curse to you instead of a blessing. If such a thing were possible, I cannot conceive of a more lamentable condition than for a man to have the happiness of salvation without the holiness of it; happily, it is not possible. If you could be saved from the consequences of sin, but not from the sin itself, and its power and pollution, it would be no blessing to you. But the salvation to which God has from the beginning chosen you is inseparably linked with the cleansing and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, who operates within you through the instrumentality of faith. Your

belief of the truth has a purifying influence upon your whole life, and makes you desire to follow in the footprints of your dear Lord and Saviour. Thus God shows his wisdom in the choice of the means which he blesses to your salvation, blessing you as much by the means as by the salvation itself, blessing you as much in the road as in the end to which it leads. You are indeed "beloved of the Lord" in having the Spirit of God thus dwelling in you, and bestowing upon you that precious gift of faith by which you are enabled to believe the truth.

Observe, too, in order to increase your joy in the Lord, the signs of this love. In the next verse, the apostle goes on to say, "whereunto he called you by our gospel." Do you not remember, you who are "beloved of the Lord," when you were called by the gospel? Then was the eternal purpose of God fulfilled in your experience. Go back in thought to the time of your espousal to Christ. Recall the sound of the silver trumpet that then brought you into gospel liberty. You had been to the house of God hundreds of times before when that same trumpet was ringing out the glad refrain,—

"The year of jubilee is come;
Return, ye ransomed sinners, home;"—

but your ears and heart had been sealed to the message. But that day the Lord opened your heart, and unstopped your ears, so that you were numbered among the happy people who heard the joyful sound. Your calling proved your election, and it stands to you still as gracious evidence of God's eternal love to you. Happy are we, too, if we can say, with the apostle, "whereunto he called you by our gospel." I know that, however many may preach the gospel better than I do, there is no one who can preach a better gospel than the one I preach, for it is that gospel which "is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." "Our gospel" is the best of gospels, the richest of gospels, it cannot be excelled, it cannot be equalled; in fact, it is the only gospel that is worthy of the name. You remember how Paul wrote to the Galatians, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another;" that is to say, it is not another gospel, and it brings only a curse both upon him who preaches it and those who receive it; but blessed are ye who have been called unto salvation by "our gospel."

There is yet one more sign of God's eternal love which is to be seen by us in the future: "to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." We who believe in Jesus are so "beloved of the Lord" that he will never be satisfied until we share his glory. So be glad in the Lord, and rejoice in the glorious prospect that he has set before you. God was not content to choose you to happiness here, but he has also chosen you to happiness hereafter; he was not satisfied with making a little heaven for you here

below, but he has made a great heaven for you up above. He has not appointed an earthly paradise where he might sometimes come to you as he came to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, but he has prepared a place for you in his own home in glory, that you may dwell for ever in your Father's house where there are many abiding places. Rejoice, then, "beloved of the Lord," that he hath "called you by our gospel to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Of course it is not in my power to enable every Christian here to suck all the sweetness out of this title, but it is in the power of the Holy Spirit to enable you to do so, and by the exercise of faith you may draw much of it out. I claim this title for myself: "beloved of the Lord;" and each brother or sister in Christ may claim it for himself or herself. "O man greatly beloved" was the title given to Danial, and that is the title that is given to every believer in Jesus. "That disciple whom Jesus loved" was the distinguishing title of one of his followers when Christ was here in the flesh; and now that after the flesh we know Christ no more, we are his in such a special sense that every child of God is "that disciple whom Jesus loves." May you get a firm grip of that truth, beloved, and realize that Jesus loves you. You cannot obtain this assurance except by faith; but when you have believed, joy and peace will quickly follow upon the heels of faith; nay, they come hand in hand, for we have joy and peace in believing.

II. I have taken so long in speaking of these titles of honour that I have very little time left for speaking of THE WEARERS OF THESE TITLES.

Suppose, dear friends, you had all heard the gospel preached, and that you understood the dignity and happiness of a Christian, what sort of a person would you suppose him to be? If I try to picture him for you, you will see how far your ideas and mine agree. I should think you would all imagine that a man who is "beloved of the Lord" would be *the happiest man in the world*. You naturally suppose that, if the eternal God has loved him, if the infinite heart of the Most High has been set upon him from all eternity, he must experience the greatest imaginable delight in such a belief, and he must feel that, whatever else he may or may not possess, he is rich to the fullest possible extent in having the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost who is given unto him. I know that a sorrowful friend over yonder is saying, "If I really could say that Jesus is mine, I would be quite content to be poor; if I were 'beloved of the Lord,' I would not mind if I had to lie in a dungeon or even to be burned to death for his sake;" so I conceive that those who are "beloved of the Lord" must be the most happy and joyful people to be found anywhere upon the face of the earth.

I suppose, too, that the influence of this love upon them would make them *very careful not to offend their loving Lord*. Naturally, the love of Christ would exercise such a constraining influence upon

them that they would feel that men so highly favoured as they are ought not to live as other men do; but that, being distinguished by such peculiar privileges, they should be "a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Without violating the proprieties of conjecture, I can conceive that the "beloved of the Lord" would be most heavenly-minded people. Having such treasure in heaven, they would naturally not care about the things of earth, but would set their affection on things above so that where their treasure is there would their heart be also. Methinks the believer would be longing and panting to get a peep through the pearly gates, and that, until he could be there with his loving Lord, he would often be singing,—

"My heart is with him on his throne,
And ill can brook delay,
Each moment listening for the voice,
'Rise up, and come away.'"

Further, I can suppose that the "beloved of the Lord" are so grateful for their Lord's love that *they are constantly telling to others the story of that love*; and that, when they meet their fellow-Christians, their constant theme of conversation is the riches of divine grace. I can suppose that these people are so different from others that, wherever they go, they are looked upon with astonishment. Difficulties I suppose they have, but being "beloved of the Lord" they take their difficulties to him, and he enables them to overcome them by his grace. Trials I suppose they have, but they are sure to go to God about them, and he either removes them or gives the necessary strength to endure them. I suppose they are people who compass sea and land, not to make proselytes to their particular sect, but by holy self-denial and consecrated service to glorify God and extend the Redeemer's kingdom on earth.

Is not this what you are longing to do, beloved? Well, it is a good thing to have high aspirations, but it is an even better thing to turn those aspirations to practical account. Is there not something that we can do for Christ to-night? The Israelites found the manna in the wilderness, not by looking up to heaven, but by looking down on the ground; and instead of looking up to heaven for means of glorifying God, we may find opportunities of doing so all around our daily path. Let us each one ask ourselves these questions, and answer them as in the sight of God,—What can I do for God in my own family circle? What can I say about Jesus to my friends? How can I bring most glory to God in my own spiritual life? What choice gift can I bring to my Saviour as Mary brought the costly ointment of spikenard, and anointed the feet of Jesus? What tears of penitence can I weep before his marred visage? What holy faith can I now exercise in his risen and glorified person? Let me, as **the "beloved of the Lord,"** with my largest ideas concerning his

glory and the coming of his kingdom, see what I can practically do to show that I truly love him by whom I am so greatly beloved.

I wish, brethren, that the portrait of the happiest man in the world that I tried to draw a few minutes ago might prove to be your own likeness. Some of you are sad and despondent, yet you are the "beloved of the Lord;" then why are you so dispirited? You are heavy of heart to-night; but, since you are the "beloved of the Lord," you should rejoice in him whatever there may be to cause you present heaviness of spirit. You have been struggling with inbred sin, and the fight has been so fierce that you have feared that you would be defeated; but, as you are the "beloved of the Lord," you must be more than conquerors through him who hath loved you. Some of you have come here to-night from the workshop where you have been laughed at and mocked, and you have most painful recollections of the scorn with which you were assailed this very afternoon; but, since you are the "beloved of the Lord," the day will come when these things will be reckoned among your highest honours. "Take that, John Bunyan," said one to a certain Christian as he pushed him into the gutter. "Oh!" said the other, "you may push me into the gutter again if you can only prove my right to bear that noble name." So may you say to those who persecute you for Christ's sake, "You may do it again if it pleases you for it would be an honour to me to be spit upon because I belong to Christ." Cultivate that spirit, brethren and sisters in Christ, and let the thought that that you are the "beloved of the Lord" make amends for every cruel act or word on the part of his enemies. When the last trumpet sounds, and the innumerable hosts of the redeemed are gathered together unto Christ, and you whom God hath from the beginning chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, you whom he hath called by our gospel, obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, you will forget the little suffering that you have ever borne on his account, and rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory that you are for ever to be numbered amongst the "beloved of the Lord."

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

ROMANS VIII. 1—14.

This wonderful chapter is the very cream of the cream of Holy Scripture. What a grand key-note the apostle strikes in the first verse!

Verse 1. *There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.**

"No condemnation"—that is the first note of the chapter. In the last verse it is "no separation." What glorious music there is here,—no condemnation to those who are in Christ, no separation of them from Christ! **Happy are the people who have a share in this double blessing, and**

* See *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, No. 1,917, "In Christ No Condemnation."