

## ROMANS 12:10 OFFERING OUR HONOR

Writer Barbara Curtis describes helping her sons one night as they journeyed the neighborhood, collecting money for their paper routes.

“Each boy was loaded with change in his pocket, pen and clipboard in hand.

“Ben’s route was closest. Heater blasting, we wound our way to the first address. I stopped the car, turned off the ignition, and turned to shoo my third son out the door. The front light was on, assuring us Ben would not stumble in the dark. But it also illuminated something special for me - a radiant smile spreading over my son’s face.

“‘The nicest people in the world,’ he said, before he stepped out into the cold...

“We drove up four doors to Ben’s next customer. As I turned off the engine, Ben beamed again. ‘The nicest people in the world!’ he said.

“‘I thought the first house was the nicest people in the world,’ I said.

“‘Yeah, but these people are, too,’ Ben answered, sincere as sunshine. Another big smile, another big tip.

“We replayed this scene again and again...Soon we were all chanting, ‘The nicest people in the world,’ in front of each customer’s house.

“For our family, this became a defining moment...Even now, ‘The Nicest People in the World’ remains part of our family’s idiom - a reminder of the gladness of heart when we forget ourselves and think more highly of those we serve.”

How do you respond to young Ben Curtis?

Maybe with warmth. “How cute, that such a young boy, could have such a great attitude!”

Maybe with skepticism. “That was just an act to get big tips. When Ben gets older, he’ll learn how people really are.”

In Romans 12, Paul is starting to answer the question, “If the gospel is true, how do we live?” We are discovering that God transforms us into the people he wants us to be, through the way we think about other people, and through the way we live before other people, especially in the church.

In this chapter, we have been called to offer our gifts, and to offer our love. Last week, we learned that the love we offer, should be real and pure, even (and especially) when we get to know each other well.

Now Paul calls us to offer something else to each other, as we offer ourselves to God in response to his mercies. We offer honor.

“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.”

Let’s use these words to size up young Ben Curtis, and ourselves, as we relate here, in our homes, and in all places.

Let’s do this by asking and answering two questions. When it comes to the issue of offering honor, what grows in us? And what comes from us?

**WHAT GROWS IN US?**

Paul writes, “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.” The honor we are called to offer, starts with what grows in our hearts, as we think of the people in our lives.

Paul’s words first direct us to **THE ROOT OF THIS GROWTH**. What must be rooted in our hearts, if we are to honor others as we should?

This root is captured in the word “brotherly.”

What is it about brothers? What is it about sisters? What is it about brothers and sisters?

We know. Members of a family have much in common.

They have a common past. Blood brothers and sisters have come from the same parents, and the same home.

They have a common present. Whatever is happening with parents and home, affects all of them.

They have a common future. Through all the seasons of life, they will have to cross paths, make decisions, and go forward together.

Yes, they may live far apart. But those common bonds and common interests keep bringing them back together.

So take that “family” image, and relate it to the church. In Jesus Christ, we are brothers and sisters. We also have much in common.

Our common past is God’s great act of sending his Son to live without sin, die for our sins, and rise for our new life.

Our common present is our call to live as brothers and sisters, in Jesus Christ, as we worship, make disciples, and teach disciples.

Our common future is the “hope of glory” - our anticipation of being with the Lord, and each other, forever.

God’s design is for us to live out this common bond, this common interest - in “brotherly” love.

We talk about “having things in common” with people. We enjoy this. At the start of the school year, I was delighted to discover that Andrew’s new teacher attended the same high school in Cincinnati as I did. I look forward to meeting him and talking about what we have in common.

But when Paul uses this word “brotherly”, he shows that “what we have in common” with other believers is unspeakably greater than anything else we will have in common with anyone else.

We don’t just have high schools in common. We don’t just have a love for football in common. We don’t just have a love for Starbucks in common. That is all nice, but what is most important is that we have a Savior in common! We share a bond in Jesus Christ, who has made us one with him, forever! Jesus is the brother who binds us together in brotherly love.

As we have seen and as we will see, God’s call to us in our relationships is rooted in his love for us, in Jesus Christ. His love forgives us. His love moves us. His love transforms us. With this root, we offer honor to each other.

What grows in us? As we read this word “brotherly”, we discover the root of our growth in honoring each other. It is our common bond in Jesus.

Then from the root of this growth, comes THE FRUIT OF THIS GROWTH.

In many English translations, we read the words, “Be devoted.” It’s an attempt to capture the idea behind a particular kind of love.

Maybe you have heard about the different words for “love” in the New Testament. The one we hear about the most is “agape”. Some have called this the uniquely Christian kind of love, because Christian writers used that word to describe the active, giving, selfless love of Jesus Christ.

But the word behind the word translated “devoted” is not “agape.” It is another word for love: “phileo”. That sounds like the word “Philadelphia”: the city of “brotherly love.”

So Paul is really saying, “Love your brothers, with whom you share this common bond, with a brotherly love.”

But what is a brotherly love? “Phileo” describes “tender affection.” It is a warm love. It is a heartfelt love.

Put it all together: with our common root in Jesus Christ, we are called to a love that is warm, heartfelt, tender, and affectionate.

Now we have a problem, don’t we? Because I have this common bond with these people, I have to have that kind of love for them? That’s easy to say, but hard to do!

Objection: “I don’t like some of these “brothers and sisters”! How am I supposed to be warm, heartfelt, tender and affectionate with them?”

Answer: The issue here is not whether you “like” your “brothers and sisters” in Jesus Christ. “Like” is an issue of taste. No one likes every person in their life.

The issue is not “liking”, but “loving.” The issue is whether because of the reality of this relationship that is rooted in Jesus Christ, you can come before that brother or sister with real, tender, heartfelt affection. The answer can be “yes”, because the Holy Spirit who lives in you, can turn your heart to such love, even when you don’t like the person that much.

Objection: “But you can’t command feelings! Feelings are what they are! If I don’t have tender affection, you can’t tell me to have tender affection!”

Answer: God can. And God can give you that tender affection, as you ask his Spirit to build it in you. Think about it. Where do our feelings come from? They flow from our thoughts, our attitudes, and even our prayers.

If the Spirit of God lives in you, the Spirit of God can direct those thoughts, attitudes and prayers so that you can indeed look upon these brothers and sisters with tender affection.

I realize this is an immense challenge to how you might think about your relationships, especially in those places where you are put with people who do not always suit your taste, or warm your feelings. But I believe we must let God do some hard work on us here.

Earlier in this chapter, Paul wrote of how we are to be “transformed” by the renewing of our minds. Our prayer and passion must be for God to change our minds and hearts, toward such tender affection.

What grows in us? What is growing in you right now, as you consider your relationships with the people in your life, especially in this body?

Do you realize the common, brotherly bond that is ours? Will you keep that bond before your mind and heart, as you deal with each other?

Will you ask God to build in you a tender affection that endures beyond your tastes and feelings? Will you ask him to do it especially as you ponder people who are difficult for you to love with a brotherly love?

What grows in us? “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.”

Then a second question: WHAT COMES FROM US? If a root of brotherly love is growing in us, bringing the fruit of tender affection, what will come from us in our relationships?

Paul writes, “Honor one another above yourselves.” We will offer our honor to each other. This is an act

of honor, leading to a culture of honor.

THE ACT OF HONOR is simply an act of valuing. When I honor you, I place a certain value on you, and treat you based on the value I give to you.

Obviously, this value should be a high value. I think you are valuable. I believe you are “worth” my honor. So I honor you.

This is a theme in Paul’s letters.

\* He writes in Philippians 2: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.” How you “consider” someone is how you “value” someone. So “consider” them better. Value them higher. Honor them more.

\* He writes in Ephesians 5, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” When you submit yourself to someone, you put yourself “under” the person. They are “above” you. You are “below” them. You honor them.

Have you ever met a famous person? It’s fun to sit in a group and talk about our brushes with well-known people. I met several politicians, athletes, and even entertainers during my time in radio. As I look back on those times, I remember how nervous I was. I remember how I tried hard to impress the person I was meeting. I remember how I wanted to be someone who would be a help to that person, rather than a bother.

Why? We “value” famous people. So we fall all over ourselves, trying to “honor” them when we are around them.

That’s the act of honor. As I look at you, my brother or sister, with tender affection, I value you more than I value myself. I honor you.

But Paul’s words also call us to what we might describe as THE CULTURE OF HONOR.

It gets a little lost in the English translation, but in the original Greek words here, there is a word that means to “go before”, or to “lead.” Paul wants the people to be setting an example for each other, in offering honor. He’s telling them to lead each other into these habits.

The result is a culture of honor. When I say “culture”, I am thinking of the “atmosphere” that exists in those relationships. We might describe it as the “air” we breathe. It’s the habit. It’s the “way we do things.” It’s just the way we are.

Do you ever walk into a room, and you can feel a mood in the air? You may know nothing about the people or situation, but you can feel anticipation, or tension, or a hundred other “moods” in the atmosphere that you have just entered.

In the same way, Paul is urging that when people enter the atmosphere of the body of Jesus Christ, they will feel and see honor all around them. That’s the culture he wants the Romans to create, as they devote themselves to one another in brotherly love, and honor one another above themselves.

So how does this happen? Think of the foundation we have laid:

\* This honor is rooted in our common bond with Jesus Christ.

\* This honor begins to grow as we look upon each other with tender affection.

\* With this bond and this affection, we value each other above ourselves.

But what does this look like in real life? What is happening, when this culture is being created? I offer three ideas, in the hope that Jesus will move your hearts and stir your imagination, in creating this culture in this place, and in all the places we go.

First, we create this culture of honor, when we come not to be served, but to serve.

Last Sunday, when the downpour struck at the end of Sunday School, I walked into the foyer, looked outside at the storm, and saw some young men carrying umbrellas, and walking people out to their cars. Yes, I know it was one good way to be in the rain without getting in trouble! But it was service. It was a small way of honoring the adults who did not want to be soaked.

Multiply it all you want, and you have a culture of honor. Someone holds a door. Someone picks up empty communion cups. Someone gladly stands in when someone else forgets to make coffee, or greet, or work in the nursery.

Someone hauls chairs after a fellowship meal. Someone drags the trash down the hall and out the back door. Someone helps hoist a new box of cups onto the top shelf of the kitchen. Someone grabs a wheelchair for someone. Someone passes out papers in Sunday School.

And on and on and on. It’s a culture. It’s an atmosphere. It’s an attitude. It’s the air we breathe.

It should be in our homes. It can be in our communities. But first, it is how we honor each other in this place, where we come not to be served, but we come to serve, as our Savior did for us, when he entered this world.

We also create this culture of honor, when we come not to be heard, but to hear.

In his little book called Life Together, Dietrich Bonehoeffer wrote,

“The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them.

“Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking where they should be listening...”

“Anyone who thinks that his time is too valuable to spend keeping quiet will ...have no time for God and his brother, but only for himself and his follies...

“We should listen with the ears of God, that we may speak the word of God.”

In a culture of honor, people listen to people. In a culture of honor, I want to hear of your life and your struggles, so that if I must speak, I am truly speaking into that life and those struggles, and not just making noise.

Culture-watchers, both Christian and non-Christian, say this is vital in our day. Relationships shatter. People are used, abused, and discarded. Where is someone who really cares?

You can shout all you want, but you will not be heard, until you listen. You honor that other person so well, when you offer the honor of your ear.

Third, we create this culture of honor, when we come not to be loved, but to love.

I recently read of a man who speaks often in public settings, like seminars and conferences. It is said that before he goes, he prays that he will be the least popular of the speakers - that when the breaks come and people start to run to the front to talk to the speakers, that he will have the smallest crowd.

He wants the other people to get the attention. He does not feel the need to be “made much of.” He is there to offer himself. Period.

It is a mark of my heart, that I am too rarely like this man. I want to be made much of. I want to be praised. I want to be honored.

But my heart must change. Must yours? At the end of the day in this community, when you have gone on your way and reflect upon your time in the presence of these other people, what should be your desire? How will you be “evaluating” the day? Will it be a “good” day because people have made much of you, or because you have made much of other people?

We so habitually enter this place, like all places, as consumers! We come to receive. We want to get. But Paul’s words flow the other way.

How can I love, by showing tender affection to that person who has felt no tender affection from anyone this week?

How can I love, by encouraging that person whose daily labors are so discouraging?

How can I love, by comforting the one who mourns?

Did I serve today? Did I listen today? Did I love today? How did I honor others in this community?

Those are the questions. Those are the issues. Not so I can walk away, patting myself on the back, but so that I can walk away, praising God for the privilege of honoring others, in the name of the One who has honored me.

By now, it should be obvious that this is not something we can do on our own! This is a work of the Holy Spirit who lives in us, transforming our minds and our hearts, growing that common bond and that tender affection, making us into people who value others so much that we serve, listen and love, first and most.

So what of young Ben Curtis? What do we say about him?

You have to wonder if those people were really all the nicest people in the world. If you have ever had a paper route, you doubt it!

But Ben Curtis’ mother wrote, “Jesus was the truest servant. When I think of the love he lavished on ordinary people who were devalued by those who thought their spiritual houses were in order, when I think of him kneeling before his disciples to wash their dirty feet, I see a dazzling smile on his face - not loving because he had to, but because he couldn’t help himself.”

Brothers and sisters, may God give us such a heart to offer honor to one another, and to all we meet! We show people Jesus, and we honor Jesus, with hearts and lives of honor for one another. May it become so much a part you and me, that we cannot help ourselves, but we offer honor as we listen, serve, and love one another.

What grows in us? The root of a common bond, and the fruit of tender affection?

What comes from us? Acts of honoring others, that create a culture of serving, listening, loving and honoring?

Can we treat each other as if we are the “nicest people in the world”?