

Being a Comfort to Others



J.R. Miller (1840-1912)

In one of his epistles, Paul speaks of certain of his friends as “*men that have been a comfort unto me*” (Colossians 4:11). He was in prison, and in his loneliness these men had cheered and strengthened him. They had been kind to him, and their kindness had comforted him.

Aristarchus

He mentions by name three men who had specially helped him in this way. The first was *Aristarchus*, whom he calls “*my fellow-prisoner.*” Perhaps he voluntarily stayed with Paul in prison. No doubt he showed his love in many ways. Someone has defined a *friend* as “the person who comes in – when all the world has gone out.” That is what Aristarchus had been to Paul.

Mark

Another who had been a comfort to him was *Mark*. We are glad to have Paul write this, for many years before Mark had failed him, and the apostle would not trust him again. It is pleasant to know that Mark lived long enough and well enough – to win again his old friend’s confidence and affection.

Justus

There is another name in this list of honor, “*Jesus who is called Justus.*” Not a hint is given of the way he had been a comfort to the apostle. Perhaps he had just been *kind* to him, doing nothing that could be written down – and yet no doubt his life was full of little gentle ministries that helped Paul more bravely and cheerfully to endure his chains. At least this man had been his friend, and just being a friend when one needs friends is something gloriously worthwhile. Someone has said, “The greatest thing that a man can do for his Heavenly Father is to be kind to some of the Father’s other children.”

The friends whom Paul names were a comfort to him, because they sympathized with him with a sympathy that was not obtrusive, not officious, not always reminding him of his chain and prison – but that manifested itself in quiet, unostentatious, inspiring ways. The word *comfort* is from a root-word which means *to strengthen*. It is like our noun *cordial*, in its old sense, something that invigorates, exhilarates; something that stimulates the circulation, making the pulse quicker, the life fuller. Paul’s friends were a *cordial* to him, not lessening his sufferings nor lightening his burdens, but making him *braver* and *stronger* for endurance. They were a comfort to him.

Paul himself was a wonderful example of a man who was a comfort to others. What his life, with its rich fullness and its genius for friendship, must have been to those who came into personal companionship with him!

What a privilege it was to his fellow-craftsmen to have him working with them at their tent-making! His presence must have made the work seem lighter and the atmosphere of the shop brighter. We do not begin to realize what it means to us – to live with certain people, to have them for friends, to drink from the fullness of their life.

One wrote of Phillips Brooks, after his death:

“We did not know how much of God was walking with us!”

Just so, men did not know how much of God was walking with them – when they had Paul for their companion, friend, teacher. The more closely we study his life and his words – the more do we find in him and in his teachings of love, of the delicate refinements of love, of all gentleness and kindness.

The thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians is as matchless as a picture. It is like a dream in its beauty, but it was a dream which was realized in the writer’s own life.

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged.

Some people *praise* this wonderful picture of love, but do not think of *living* it. What a comfort we would be to each other if we really *lived*, in all our common days, the teaching of this great chapter!

Some people have love in their *hearts*, while in *disposition*, in *speech*, in *expression*, they lack lovingness. Paul teaches us not only to have a kindly heart, but a *gracious manner*.

We condemn lying – as well we may – but we forget that *rudeness* is a sin, too, as are also *thoughtlessness*, *discourtesy*, *ensoriousness*, sharpness in speech or tone.

Paul names “*whatever things are lovely*” among the ideal qualities of Christian character. Those who live thus gently, thoughtfully, beautifully, will always be a comfort to others with whom they live.

We may do all of our duties faithfully, conscientiously, bearing our share of the burdens and cares – and yet if we are not *pleasant to live with*, we fail in the most essential quality of love. An unlovely spirit – frowns and chilling looks, sharp, impatient words – outweigh the eager, painstaking service

that does so much to help in practical ways. What the person IS mars the value of what he DOES.

The ideal life is one that is a *comfort* to others – as well as a *help*. It is gracious and winning in its spirit. It is a blessing to all it touches. It makes one a comfort, not only in his own home, where even his *dog* has a more pleasant life, but also among his neighbors, and in the office or shop where he works.

Are we a *comfort* to people? Are the boys and girls a comfort to their mothers and fathers? or do they vex them, fret them, keep them awake at night with anxiety? Are husbands and wives a real comfort to each other? Are we a comfort to our neighbors, kindly, thoughtful, obliging, ready always to be helpful and gracious?

It has been named as the mark of a *gentleman* that he never gives pain to another. An English poet called Jesus “the truest gentleman who ever breathed.” He never gave pain to anyone. Love characterized Him in all circumstances and experiences. Even when He was being betrayed, He was still a gentleman. When He was being nailed to the cross – He prayed for His executioners. Love never failed in Him. He was always a comfort to others.

We as members of Christ’s Body should be so full of His spirit, have our lives so permeated with His grace and love that we shall be a *comfort* to all men, and, above all, shall be a comfort to God!

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