

1 Corinthians 1:10

by St. John Chrysostom

St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the importance of unity in the Church, urging believers to avoid divisions and to focus on their common identity in Christ.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:10-17

Topics: "Church Unity", "Christian Conduct"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of unity in the church, urging believers to speak the same language, avoid divisions, and be of one mind and judgment, beseeching them through the name of Christ to maintain harmony. He emphasizes the dangers of divisions and the need for gentle rebukes to prevent the tearing apart of the Church. Chrysostom highlights the folly of boasting about baptizing others, pointing out that the greatness of Baptism lies in God's grace, not in the baptizer. He encourages believers to live out their faith through their actions, astound the world by their way of life, and win souls for Christ through their conduct.

Transcript

1 Corinthians 1:10

Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak of the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that you be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

What I have continually been saying, that we must frame our rebukes gently and gradually, this Paul does here also; in that, being about to enter upon a subject full of many dangers and enough to tear up the Church from her foundations he uses very mild language. His word is that he beseeches them, and beseeches them through Christ; as though not even he were sufficient alone to make this supplication, and to prevail.

But what is this, I beseech you through Christ? I take Christ to fight on my side, and to aid me, His injured and insulted Name. An awful way of speaking indeed! lest they should prove hard and shameless: for sin makes men restless. Wherefore if at once (ἐν μὲν ἐπιτιμῶσι πικρῆς Savil. ἐν μὲν Ben.) you sharply rebuke you make a man fierce and impudent: but if you put him to shame, you bow down his neck, you check his confidence, you make him hang down his head. Which object being Paul's also, he is content for a while to beseech them through the Name of Christ. And what, of all things, is the object of his request?

That ye may all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions [schisms] among you. The emphatic force of the word schism, I mean the name itself, was a sufficient accusation. For it was not that they had become many parts, each entire within itself, but rather the One [Body which originally existed] had perished. For had they been entire Churches, there might be many of them; but if they were divisions, then that first One had gone. For that which is entire within itself not only does not become many by division into many parts, but even the original One is lost. Such is the nature of divisions.

2. In the next place, because he had sharply dealt with them by using the word schism, he again softens and soothes them, saying, That ye may be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. That is; since he had said, That ye may all speak the same thing; do not suppose, he adds, that I said concord should be only in words; I seek for that harmony which is of the mind. But since there is such a thing as agreement in words, and that hearty, not however on all subjects, therefore he added this, That ye may be perfected together. For he that is united in one thing, but in another dissents, is no longer perfected, nor fitted in to complete accordance. There is also such a thing as harmony of opinions, where there is not yet harmony of sentiment; for instance, when having the same faith we are not joined together in love: for thus, in opinions we are one, (for we think the same things,) but in sentiment not so. And such was the case at that time; this person choosing one [leader], and that, another. For this reason he says it is necessary to agree both in mind and in judgment. For it was not from any difference in faith that the schisms arose, but from the division of their judgment through human contentiousness.

3. But seeing that whoever is blamed is unabashed so long as he has no witnesses, observe how, not permitting them to deny the fact, he adduces some to bear witness.

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For it has been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren, by them which are of the household of Chloe. Neither did he say this at the very beginning, but first he brought forward his charge; as one who put confidence in his informants. Because, had it not been so, he would not have found fault: for Paul was not a person to believe lightly. Neither then did he immediately say, it has been signified, lest he might seem to blame on their authority: neither does he omit all mention of them, lest he should seem to speak only from himself. And again, he styles them brethren; for although the fault be plain, there is nothing against calling people brethren still. Consider also his prudence in not speaking of any distinct person, but of the entire family; so as not to make them hostile towards the informer: for in this way he both protects him, and fearlessly opens the accusation. For he had an eye to the benefit not of the one side only, but of the other also. Wherefore he says not, It has been declared to me by certain, but he indicates also the household, lest they might suppose that he was inventing.

4. What was declared? That there are contentions among you. Thus, when he is rebuking them, he says, That there be no divisions among you; but when he is reporting the statements of others, he does it more gently; saying, For it has been declared unto me...that there are contentions among you; in order that he might not bring trouble upon the informants.

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Next he declares also the kind of contention.

That each one of you says, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas. I say, contentions, says he, I mean, not about private matters, but of the more grievous sort. That each one of you says; for the

corruption pervaded not a part, but the whole of the Church. And yet they were not speaking about himself, nor about Peter, nor about Apollos; but he signifies that if these were not to be leaned on, much less others. For that they had not spoken about them, he says further on: And these things I have transferred in a figure unto myself and Apollos, that you may learn in us not to go beyond the things which are written. For if it were not right for them to call themselves by the name of Paul, and of Apollos, and of Cephas, much less of any others. If under the Teacher and the first of the Apostles, and one that had instructed so much people, it were not right to enroll themselves, much less under those who were nothing. By way of hyperbole then, seeking to withdraw them from their disease, he sets down these names. Besides, he makes his argument less severe, not mentioning by name the rude dividers of the Church, but concealing them, as behind a sort of masks, with the names of the Apostles.

I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas. Not esteeming himself before Peter has he set his name last, but preferring Peter to himself, and that greatly. He arranged his statement in the way of climax, (κατὰ ἀξίησιν) that he might not be supposed to do this for envy; or, from jealousy, to be detracting from the honor of others. Wherefore also he put his own name first. For he who puts himself foremost to be rejected, does so not for love of honor, but for extreme contempt of this sort of reputation. He puts himself, you see, in the way of the whole attack, and then mentions Apollos, and then Cephas. Not therefore to magnify himself did he do this, but in speaking of wrong things he administers the requisite correction in his own person first.

5. But that those who addicted themselves to this or that man were in error, is evident. And rightly he rebukes them, saying, You do not well in that you say, 'I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas.' But why did he add, And I of Christ? For although these who addicted themselves to men were in error, not surely (οὐδέ ποτε Bened. οὐδέ ποτε Savil.) those who dedicated themselves unto Christ. But this was not his charge, that they called themselves by the Name of Christ, but that they did not all call themselves by that Name alone. And I think that he added this of himself, wishing to make the accusation more grievous, and to point out that by this rule Christ must be considered as belonging to one party only: although they were not so using the Name themselves. For that this was what he hinted at he declared in the sequel, saying,

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Is Christ divided. What he says comes to this: You have cut in pieces Christ, and distributed His body. Here is anger! Here is chiding! Here are words full of indignation! For whenever instead of arguing he interrogates only, his doing so implies a confessed absurdity.

But some say that he glanced at something else, in saying, Christ is divided: as if he had said, He has distributed to men and parted the Church, and taken one share Himself, giving them the other. Then in what follows, he labors to overthrow this absurdity, saying, Was Paul crucified for you, or were ye baptized into the name of Paul? Observe his Christ-loving mind; how thenceforth he brings the whole matter to a point in his own name, showing, and more than showing, that this honor belongs to no one. And that no one might think it was envy which moved him to say these things, therefore he is constantly putting himself forward. Observe, too, his considerate way, in that he says not, Did Paul make the world? Did Paul from nothing produce you into being? But only those things which belonged as choice treasures to the faithful, and were regarded with great solicitude -- those he specifies, the Cross, and Baptism, and the blessings following on these. For the loving-kindness of God towards men is shown by the creation of the world also: in nothing, however, so much as by the (τῆς συγκραταβῆσεως) condescension through the Cross. And he

said not, did Paul die for you? but, was Paul crucified? setting down also the kind of death.

Or were ye baptized into the name of Paul? Again, he says not, did Paul baptize you? For he did baptize many: but this was not the question, by whom they had been baptized, but, into whose name they had been baptized! For since this also was a cause of schisms, their being called after the name of those who baptized them, he corrects this error likewise saying, Were ye baptized into the name of Paul? Tell me not, says he, who baptized, but into whose name. For not he that baptizes, but he who is invoked in the Baptism, is the subject of enquiry. For this is He who forgives our sins.

And at this point he stays the discourse, and does not pursue the subject any further. For he says not, Did Paul declare to you the good things to come? Did Paul promise you the kingdom of heaven? Why, then, I ask, does he not add these questions also? Because it is not all as one, to promise a kingdom and to be crucified. For the former neither had danger nor brought shame; but the latter, all these. Moreover, he proves the former from the latter: for having said, Romans 8:32 He that spared not His own Son, he adds, How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? And again, Romans 5:10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled unto God by the death of His Son, much more bring reconciled, we shall be saved. This was one reason for his not adding what I just mentioned: and also because the one they had not as yet, but of the other they had already made trial. The one were in promise; the other had already come to pass.

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6. I thank God that I baptized none of you but Crispus and Gaius. Why are you elate at having baptized, when I for my part even give thanks that I have not done so! Thus saying, by a kind of divine art (ο■κονομικ■ς) he does away with their swelling pride upon this point; not with the efficacy of the baptism, (God forbid,) but with the folly of those who were puffed up at having been baptizers: first, by showing that the Gift is not theirs; and, secondly, by thanking God therefore. For Baptism truly is a great thing: but its greatness is not the work of the person baptizing, but of Him who is invoked in the Baptism: since to baptize is nothing as regards man's labor, but is much less than preaching the Gospel. Yea, again I say, great indeed is Baptism, and without baptism it is impossible to obtain the kingdom. Still a man of no singular excellence is able to baptize, but to preach the Gospel there is need of great labor.

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He states also the reason, why he gives thanks that he had baptized no one. What then is this reason? Lest anyone should say that you were baptized into my own name. Why, did he mean that they said this in those other cases? Not at all; but, I fear, says he, lest the disease should proceed even to that. For if, when insignificant persons and of little worth baptize, a heresy arises, had I, the first announcer of Baptism, baptized many, it was likely that they forming a party, would not only call themselves by my name, but also ascribe the Baptism to me. For if from the inferiors so great an evil arose, from those of higher order it would perhaps have gone on to something far more grievous.

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Then, having abashed those who were unsound in this respect and subjoining, I baptized also the house of Stephanas, he again drags down their pride, saying besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For by this he signifies that neither did he seek much to enjoy the honor accruing hereby from the multitude, nor did he set about this work for glory's sake.

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And not by these only, but also by the next words, he greatly represses their pride, saying, Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel: for the more laborious part, and that which needed much toil and a soul of iron, and that on which all depended, was this. And therefore it was that Paul had it put into his hand.

And why, not being sent to baptize, did he baptize? Not in contention with Him that sent him, but in this instance laboring beyond his task. For he says not, I was forbidden, but, I was not sent for this, but for that which was of the greatest necessity. For preaching the Gospel is a work perhaps for one or two; but baptizing, for everyone endowed with the priesthood. For a man being instructed and convinced, to take and baptize him is what any one whatever might do: for the rest, it is all effected by the will of the person drawing near, and the grace of God. But when unbelievers are to be instructed, there must be great labor, great wisdom. And at that time there was danger also annexed. In the former case the whole thing is done, and he is convinced, who is on the point of initiation: and it is no great thing when a man is convinced, to baptize him. But in the later case the labor is great, to change the deliberate will, to alter the turn of mind, and to tear up error by the roots, and to plant the truth in its place.

Not that he speaks out all this, neither does he argue in so many words that Baptism has no labor, but that preaching has. For he knows how always to subdue his tone, whereas in the comparison with heathen wisdom he is very earnest, the subject enabling him to use more vehemency of language.

Not therefore in opposition to Him that sent him did he baptize; but, as in the case of the widows, though the apostles had said, Acts 6:2 it is not fit that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables, he discharged the office Acts 12:25. τὴν διακονίαν of a deacon, not in opposition to them, but as something beyond his task: so also here. For even now, we commit this matter to the simpler sort of presbyters, but the word of doctrine unto the wiser: for there is the labor and the sweat. Wherefore he says himself, 1 Timothy 5:17 Let the Elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the word and in teaching. For as to teach the wrestlers in the games is the part of a spirited and skilful trainer, but to place the crown on the conquerors head may be that of one who cannot even wrestle, (although it be the crown which adds splendor to the conqueror,) so also in Baptism. It is impossible to be saved without it, yet it is no great thing which the baptizer does, finding the will ready prepared.

7. Not in wisdom of words, lest the Cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

Having brought down the swelling pride of those who were arrogant because of their baptizing, he changes his ground afterwards to meet those who boasted about heathen wisdom, and against them he puts on his armor with more vehemency. For to those who were puffed up with baptizing he said, I give thanks that I baptized no one; and, for Christ sent me not to baptize. He speaks neither vehemently nor argumentatively, but, having just hinted his meaning in a few words, passes on quickly. But here at the very outset he gives a severe blow, saying, Lest the Cross of Christ be made void. Why then pride yourself on a thing which ought to make you hide your face? Since, if this wisdom is at war with the Cross and fights with the Gospel, it is not meet to boast about it, but to retire with shame. For this was the cause why the Apostles were not wise; not through any weakness of the Gift, but lest the Gospel preached suffer harm. The sort of people therefore above mentioned were not those employed in advocating the Word: rather they were among its defamers. The unlearned men were the establishers of it. This was able to check vain glory, this to repress arrogance, this to enforce moderation.

But if it was 'not by wisdom of speech,' why did they send Apollos who was eloquent? It was not, he replies, through confidence in his power of speech, but because he was Acts 18:24-29 mighty in the Scriptures, and confuted the Jews. And besides the point in question was that the leaders and first disseminators of the word were not eloquent; since these were the very persons to require some great power, for the expulsion of error in the first instance; and then, namely at the very outset, was the abundant strength needed. Now He who could do without educated persons at first, if afterwards some being eloquent were admitted by Him, He did so not because He wanted them, but because He would make no distinctions. For as He needed not wise men to effect whatever He would, so neither, if any were afterwards found such, did He reject them on that account.

8. But prove to me that Peter and Paul were eloquent. You can not: for they were unlearned and ignorant men! As therefore Christ, when He was sending out His disciples into the world, having shown unto them His power in Palestine first, and said, Luke 22:35(■ποδ■μ■τος, rec. text ■ποδηματων.) When I sent you forth without purse and wallet and shoe, lacked ye any thing? permitted them from that time forward to possess both a wallet and a purse; so also He has done here: for the point was the manifestation of Christ's power, not the rejection of persons from the Faith on account of their Gentile wisdom, if they were drawing near. When the Greeks then charge the disciples with being uneducated, let us be even more forward in the charge than they. Nor let anyone say, Paul was wise; but while we exalt those among them who were great in wisdom and admired for their excellency of speech, let us allow that all on our side were uneducated; for it will be no slight overthrow which they will sustain from us in that respect also: and so the victory will be brilliant indeed.

I have said these things, because I once heard a Christian disputing in a ridiculous manner with a Greek, and both parties in their mutual fray ruining themselves. For what things the Christian ought to have said, these the Greek asserted; and what things it was natural to expect the Greek would say, these the Christian pleaded for himself. As thus: the dispute being about Paul and Plato, the Greek endeavored to show that Paul was unlearned and ignorant; but the Christian, from simplicity, was anxious to prove that Paul was more eloquent than Plato. And so the victory was on the side of the Greek, this argument being allowed to prevail. For if Paul was a more considerable person than Plato, many probably would object that it was not by grace, but by excellency of speech that he prevailed; so that the Christian's assertion made for the Greek. And what the Greek said made for the Christian's; for if Paul was uneducated and yet overcame Plato, the victory, as I was saying, was brilliant; the disciples of the latter, in a body, having been attracted by the former, unlearned as he was, and convinced, and brought over to his side. From whence it is plain that the Gospel was a result not of human wisdom, but of the grace of God.

Wherefore, lest we fall into the same error, and be laughed to scorn, arguing thus with Greeks whenever we have a controversy with them; let us charge the Apostles with want of learning; for this same charge is praise. And when they say that the Apostles were rude, let us follow up the remark and say that they were also untaught, and unlettered, and poor, and vile, and stupid, and obscure. It is not a slander on the Apostles to say so, but it is even a glory that, being such, they should have outshone the whole world. For these untrained, and rude, and illiterate men, as completely vanquished the wise, and powerful, and the tyrants, and those who flourished in wealth and glory and all outward good things, as though they had not been men at all: from whence it is manifest that great is the power of the Cross; and that these things were done by no human strength. For the results do not keep the course of nature, rather what was done was above all nature. Now when any thing takes place above nature, and exceedingly above it, on the side of rectitude and utility; it is quite plain that these things are done by some Divine power and cooperation. And

observe; the fisherman, the tentmaker, the publican, the ignorant, the unlettered, coming from the far distant country of Palestine, and having beaten off their own ground the philosophers, the masters of oratory, the skillful debaters, alone prevailed against them in a short space of time; in the midst of many perils; the opposition of peoples and kings, the striving of nature herself, length of time, the vehement resistance of inveterate custom, demons in arms, the devil in battle array and stirring up all, kings, rulers, peoples, nations, cities, barbarians, Greeks, philosophers, orators, sophists, historians, laws, tribunals, various kinds of punishments, deaths innumerable and of all sorts. But nevertheless all these were confuted and gave way when the fisherman spoke; just like the light dust which cannot bear the rush of violent winds. Now what I say is, let us learn thus to dispute with the Greeks; that we be not like beasts and cattle, but prepared concerning the hope which is in us. 1 St. Peter 3:15 And let us pause for a while to work out this topic, no unimportant one; and let us say to them, How did the weak overcome the strong; the twelve, the world? Not by using the same armor, but in nakedness contending with men in arms.

For say, if twelve men, unskilled in matters of war, were to leap into an immense and armed host of soldiers, themselves not only unarmed but of weak frame also; and to receive no harm from them, nor yet be wounded, though assailed with ten thousand weapons; if while the darts were striking them, with bare naked body they overthrew all their foes using no weapons but striking with the hand, and in conclusion killed some, and others took captive and led away, themselves receiving not so much as a wound; would anyone have ever said that the thing was of man? And yet the trophy of the Apostles is much more wonderful than that. For a naked man's escaping a wound is not so wonderful by far as that the ordinary and unlettered person -- that a fisherman -- should overcome such a degree of talent: (δεινότητος) and neither for fewness, nor for poverty, nor for dangers, nor for prepossession of habit, nor for so great austerity of the precepts enjoined, nor for the daily deaths, nor for the multitude of those who were deceived, nor for the great reputation of the deceivers be turned from his purpose.

9. Let this, I say, be our way of overpowering them, and of conducting our warfare against them; and let us astound them by our way of life rather than by words. For this is the main battle, this is the unanswerable argument, the argument from conduct. For though we give ten thousand precepts of philosophy in words, if we do not exhibit a life better than theirs, the gain is nothing. For it is not what is said that draws their attention, but their enquiry is, what we do; and they say, First obey your own words, and then admonish others. But if while you say, infinite are the blessings in the world to come, thou seem yourself nailed down to this world, just as if no such things existed, your works to me are more credible than your words. For when I see you seizing other men's goods, weeping immoderately over the departed, doing ill in many other things, how shall I believe you that there is a resurrection? And what if men utter not this in words? They think it and turn it often in their minds. And this is what stays the unbelievers from becoming Christians.

Let us win them therefore by our life. Many, even among the untaught, have in that way astounded the minds of philosophers, as having exhibited in themselves also that philosophy which lies in deeds, and uttered a voice clearer than a trumpet by their mode of life and self-denial. For this is stronger than the tongue. But when I say, one ought not to bear malice, and then do all manner of evils to the Greek, how shall I be able by words to win him, while by my deeds I am frightening him away?

Let us catch them then by our mode of life; and by these souls let us build up the Church, and of these let us amass our wealth. There is nothing to weigh against a soul, not even the whole world. So that although thou give countless treasure unto the poor, you will do no such work as he who converts one soul. Jeremiah 15:19 For he that takes forth the precious from the vile shall be as my mouth: so He speaks. A

great good it is, I grant, to have pity on the poor; but it is nothing equal to the withdrawing them from error.

For he that does this resembles Paul and Peter: we being permitted to take up their Gospel, not with perils such as theirs -- with endurance of famines and pestilences, and all other evils, (for the present is a season of peace;)-- but so as to display that diligence which comes of zeal. For even while we sit at home we may practice this kind of fishery. Who has a friend or relation or inmate of his house, these things let him say, these do; and he shall be like Peter and Paul.

And why do I say Peter and Paul? He shall be the mouth of Christ. For He says, He that takes forth the precious from the vile shall be as My mouth. And though thou persuade not today, tomorrow you shall persuade. And though thou never persuade, you shall have your own reward in full. And though thou persuade not all, a few out of many persuade all men; but still they discoursed with all, and for all they have their reward. For not according to the result of the things that are well done, but according to the intention of the doers, is God wont to assign the crowns; though thou pay down but two farthings, He receives them; and what He did in the case of the widow, the same will He do also in the case of those who teach.

Do not thou then, because you can not save the world, despise the few; nor through longing after great things, withdraw yourself from the lesser. If you can not an hundred, take thou charge of ten; if you can not ten, despise not even five; if you can not five, do not overlook one; and if you can not one, neither so despair, nor keep back what may be done by you. Do you see not how, in matters of trade, they who are so employed make their profit not only of gold but of silver also?

For if we do not slight the little things, we shall keep hold also of the great. But if we despise the small, neither shall we easily lay hand upon the other. Thus individuals become rich, gathering both small things and great. And so let us act; that in all things enriched, we may obtain the kingdom of heaven; through the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom and with Whom unto the Father together with the Holy Spirit be glory, power, honor, now and henceforth and for evermore. Amen.

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