

1 Corinthians 1:4-5

by St. John Chrysostom

Paul emphasizes the importance of thanksgiving and the gift of God's grace, and encourages the Corinthians to be patient and to wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 43:4, 1 Corinthians 1:4-10, Philippians 4:6

Topics: "Thanksgiving", "Humility"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches on the importance of giving thanks to God always, as exemplified by the Apostle Paul in his letters to the Corinthians. He emphasizes that true grace from God leads to enrichment in every aspect of life, highlighting the need to remain humble and avoid pride. Chrysostom points out that the Corinthians were enriched by Jesus Christ Himself, not through their own works, and encourages them to focus on the grace of God rather than boasting in their own abilities.

Transcript

1 Corinthians 1:4-5

I thank my God always concerning you, for the Grace of God which was given you in Jesus Christ; that in every thing you were enriched in him.

1. That which he exhorts others to do, saying, Philippians 4:6 Let your requests with thanksgiving be made known unto God, the same also he used to do himself: teaching us to begin always from these words, and before all things to give thanks unto God. For nothing is so acceptable to God as that men should be thankful, both for themselves and for others: wherefore also he prefaces almost every Epistle with this. But the occasion for his doing so is even more urgent here than in the other Epistles. For he that gives thanks, does so, both as being well off, and as in acknowledgment of a favor: now a favor is not a debt nor a requital nor a payment: which indeed every where is important to be said, but much more in the case of the Corinthians who were gaping after the dividers of the Church.

2. Unto my God. Out of great affection he seizes on that which is common, and makes it his own; as the prophets also from time to time use to say, Psalm 43:4; 62:1 O God, my God; and by way of encouragement he incites them to use the same language also themselves. For such expressions belong to one who is retiring from all secular things, and moving towards Him whom he calls on with so much earnestness: since he alone can truly say this, who from things of this life is ever mounting upwards unto God, and always preferring Him to all, and giving thanks continually, not [only] for the grace already given,

but whatever blessing has been since at any time bestowed, for this also he offers unto Him the same praise. Wherefore he says not merely, I give thanks, but at all times, concerning you; instructing them to be thankful both always, and to no one else save God only.

3. For the grace of God. Do you see how from every quarter he draws topics for correcting them? For where grace is, works are not; where works, it is no more grace. If therefore it be grace, why are you high-minded? Whence is it that you are puffed up?

Which is given you. And by whom was it given? By me, or by another Apostle? Not at all, but by Jesus Christ. For the expression, In Jesus Christ, signifies this. Observe how in various places he uses the word ν , in, instead of δ σ , through means of whom; therefore its sense is no less.

That in every thing you were enriched. Again, by whom? By Him, is the reply. And not merely you were enriched, but in every thing. Since then it is first of all, riches then, riches of God, next, in every thing, and lastly, through the Only-Begotten, reflect on the ineffable treasure!

1 Corinthians 1:5

In all utterance, and all knowledge. Word [or utterance,] not such as the heathen, but that of God. For there is knowledge without word, and there is knowledge with word. For so there are many who possess knowledge, but have not the power of speech; as those who are uneducated and unable to exhibit clearly what they have in their mind. You, says he, are not such as these, but competent both to understand and to speak.

1 Corinthians 1:6

Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you. Under the color of praises and thanksgiving he touches them sharply. For not by heathen philosophy, says he, neither by heathen discipline, but the grace of God, and by the riches, and the knowledge, and the word given by Him, were you enabled to learn the doctrines of the truth, and to be confirmed unto the testimony of the Lord; that is, unto the Gospel. For you had the benefit of many signs, many wonders, unspeakable grace, to make you receive the Gospel. If therefore you were established by signs and grace, why do you waver? Now these are the words of one both reproofing, and at the same time prepossessing them in his favor.

1 Corinthians 1:7

4. So that you come behind in no gift. A great question here arises. They who had been enriched in all utterance, so as in no respect to come behind in any gift, are they carnal? For if they were such at the beginning, much more now. How then does he call them carnal? For, says he, 1 Corinthians 3:1 I was not able to speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal. What must we say then? That having in the beginning believed, and obtained all gifts, (for indeed they sought them earnestly,) they became remiss afterwards. Or, if not so, that not unto all are either these things said or those; but the one to such as were amenable to his censures, the other to such as were adorned with his praises. For as to the fact that they still had gifts; 1 Corinthians 14:26-29 Each one, says he, has a psalm, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation; let all things be done unto edifying. And, Let the prophets speak two or three. Or we may state it somewhat differently; that as it is usual with us to call the greater part the whole, so also he has spoken in this place. Withal, I think he hints at his own proceedings; for he too had shown forth signs; even as also he says in the second Epistle to them, 2 Corinthians 12:12-13 Truly the signs of an Apostle were

wrought among you in all patience: and again, For what is there wherein you were inferior to other churches?

Or, as I was saying, he both reminds them of his own miracles and speaks thus with an eye to those who were still approved. For many holy men were there who had set themselves to minister unto the saints, and had become the first fruits of Achaia; as he declares 1 Corinthians 16:15 towards the end.

5. In any case, although the praises be not very close to the truth, still however they are inserted by way of precaution, (οικονομικῶς) preparing the way beforehand for his discourse. For whoever at the very outset speaks things unpleasant, excludes his words from a hearing among the weaker: since if the hearers be his equals in degree they feel angry; if vastly inferior they will be vexed. To avoid this, he begins with what seem to be praises. I say, seem; for not even did this praise belong to them, but to the grace of God. For that they had remission of sins, and were justified, this was of the Gift from above. Wherefore also he dwells upon these points, which show the loving-kindness of God, in order that he may the more fully purge out their malady.

6. Waiting for the revelation (ἐπιφάνειαν) of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why do you make much ado, says he, why are you troubled that Christ is not come? Nay, he has come; and the Day is henceforth at the doors. And consider his wisdom; how withdrawing them from human considerations he terrifies them by mention of the fearful judgment-seat, and thus implying that not only the beginnings must be good, but the end also. For with all these gifts, and with all else that is good, we must be mindful of that Day: and there is need of many labors to be able to come unto the end. Revelation is his word; implying that although He be not seen, yet He is, and is present even now, and then shall appear. Therefore there is need of patience: for to this end did you receive the wonders, that you may remain firm.

1 Corinthians 1:8

7. Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that you may be unreprouable. Here he seems to court them, but the saying is free from all flattery; for he knows also how to press them home; as when he says, 1 Corinthians 4:18-21 Now some are puffed up as though I would not come to you: and again, What will you? Shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness? And, 2 Corinthians 13:3 Since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me. But he is also covertly accusing them: for, to say, He shall confirm, and the word unreprouable marks them out as still wavering, and liable to reproof.

But do thou consider how he always fastens them as with nails to the Name of Christ. And not any man nor teacher, but continually the Desired One Himself is remembered by him: setting himself, as it were to arouse those who were heavy-headed after some debauch. For no where in any other Epistle does the Name of Christ occur so continually. But here it is, many times in a few verses; and by means of it he weaves together, one may say, the whole of the proem. Look at it from the beginning. Paul called [to be] an Apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have been sanctified in Jesus Christ, who call upon the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, grace [be] unto you and peace from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God for the grace which has been given you by Jesus Christ, even as the testimony of Christ has been confirmed in you, waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall confirm you unreprouable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you have been called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. And I beseech you by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you see the constant repetition of the Name of Christ? From whence it is plain even to the most unobservant, that not by chance nor unwittingly he does this, but in order that by incessant application of

that glorious Name he may foment their inflammation, and purge out the corruption of the disease.

1 Corinthians 1:9

8. God is faithful, by whom you were called unto the fellowship of His Son. Wonderful! How great a thing says he here! How vast in the magnitude of the gift which he declares! Into the fellowship of the Only-Begotten have you been called, and do you addict yourselves unto men? What can be worse than this wretchedness? And how have you been called? By the Father. For since through Him, and in Him, were phrases which he was constantly employing in regard of the Son, lest men might suppose that he so mentions Him as being less, he ascribes the same to the Father. For not by this one and that one, says he, but by the Father have you been called; by Him also have you been enriched. Again, you have been called; ye did not yourselves approach. But what means, into the fellowship of His Son? Hear him declaring this very thing more clearly elsewhere. 2 Timothy 2:12 If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him; if we die with Him, we shall also live with Him. Then, because it was a great thing which He had said, he adds an argument fraught with unanswerable conviction; for, says he, God is faithful, i.e. true. Now if true, what things He has promised He will also perform. And He has promised that He will make us partakers of His only-begotten Son; for to this end also did He call us. For Romans 11:29 His gifts, and the calling of God, are without repentance.

These things, by a kind of divine art he inserts thus early, lest after the vehemence of the reproofs they might fall into despair. For assuredly God's part will ensue, if we be not quite impatient of His rein. (■φηνι■σωμεν) As the Jews, being called, would not receive the blessings; but this was no longer of Him that called, but of their lack of sense. For He indeed was willing to give, but they, by refusing to receive, cast themselves away. For, had He called to a painful and toilsome undertaking, not even in that case were they pardonable in making excuse; however, they would have been able to say that so it was: but if the call be unto cleansing, Comp. 1 Corinthians 1:4-7 and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, and grace, and a free gift, and the good things in store, which eye has not seen, nor ear heard; and it be God that calls, and calls by Himself; what pardon can they deserve, who come not running to Him? Let no one therefore accuse God; for unbelief comes not of Him that calls, but of those who start away (■ποπηδ■ντας) from Him.

9. But some man will say, He ought to bring men in, even against their will. Away with this. He does not use violence, nor compel; for who that bids to honors, and crowns, and banquets, and festivals, drags people, unwilling and bound? No one. For this is the part of one inflicting an insult. Unto hell He sends men against their will, but unto the kingdom He calls willing minds. To the fire He brings men bound and bewailing themselves: to the endless state of blessings not so. Else it is a reproach to the very blessings themselves, if their nature be not such as that men should run to them of their own accord and with many thanks.

Whence it is then, say you, that all men do not choose them? From their own infirmity. And wherefore does He not cut off their infirmity? And how tell me -- in what way -- ought He to cut it off? Hath He not made a world that teaches His loving-kindness and His power? For Psalm 19:1 the heavens, says one, declare the glory of God. Hath He not also sent prophets? Hath He not both called and honored us? Hath He not done wonders? Hath He not given a law both written and natural? Hath He not sent His Son? Hath he not commissioned Apostles? Hath He not wrought sins? Hath He not threatened hell? Hath He not promised the kingdom? Does He not every day make His sun to rise? Are not the things which He has enjoined so simple and easy, that many transcend His commandments in the greatness of their

self-denial? What was there to do unto the vineyard and I have not done it? Isaiah 5:4

10. And why, say you, did He not make knowledge and virtue natural to us? Who speaks thus? The Greek or the Christian? Both of them, indeed, but not about the same things: for the one raises his objection with a view to knowledge, the other with a view to conduct. First, then, we will reply to him who is on our side; for I do not so much regard those without, as our own members.

What then says the Christian? It were meet to have implanted in us the knowledge itself of virtue. He has implanted it; for if he had not done so, whence should we have known what things are to be done, what left undone? Whence are the laws and the tribunals? But God should have imparted not [merely] knowledge, but also the very doing of it [virtue]. For what then would you have to be rewarded, if the whole were of God? For tell me, does God punish in the same manner you and the Greek upon committing sin? Surely not. For up to a certain point you have confidence, viz. that which arises from the true knowledge. What then, if any one should now say that on the score of knowledge thou and the Greek will be accounted of like desert? Would it not disgust you? I think so, indeed. For you would say that the Greek, having of his own wherewith to attain knowledge, was not willing. If then the latter also should say that God ought to have implanted knowledge in us naturally, will you not laugh him to scorn, and say to him, But why did you not seek for it? Why were you not in earnest even as I? And you will stand firm with much confidence, and say that it was extreme folly to blame God for not implanting knowledge by nature. And this you will say, because you have obtained what appertains to knowledge. So also had you performed what appertains to practice, you would not have raised these questions: but you are tired of virtuous practice, therefore you shelter yourself with these inconsiderate words. But how could it be at all right to cause that by necessity one should become good? Then shall we next have the brute beasts contending with us about virtue, seeing that some of them are more temperate than ourselves.

But you say, I had rather have been good by necessity, and so forfeited all rewards, than evil by deliberate choice, to be punished and suffer vengeance. But it is impossible that one should ever be good by necessity. If therefore you know not what ought to be done, show it, and then we will tell you what is right to say. But if you know that uncleanness is wicked, wherefore do you not fly from the evil thing?

I cannot, you say. But others who have done greater things than this will plead against you, and will more than prevail to stop your mouth. For thou, perhaps, though living with a wife, are not chaste; but another even without a wife keeps his chastity inviolate. Now what excuse have you for not keeping the rule, while another even leaps beyond the lines that have been drawn to mark it?

But you say, I am not of this sort in my bodily frame, or my turn of mind. That is for want, not of power, but of will. For thus I prove that all have a certain aptness towards virtue: That which a man cannot do, neither will he be able to do though necessity be laid upon him; but, if, necessity being laid upon him, he is able, he that leaves it undone, leaves it undone out of choice. The kind of thing I mean is this: to fly up and be borne towards heaven, having a heavy body, is even simply impossible.

What then, if a king should command one to do this, and threaten death, saying, Those men who do not fly, I decree that they lose their heads, or be burnt, or some other such punishment: would any one obey him? Surely not. For nature is not capable of it. But if in the case of chastity this same thing were done, and he were to lay down laws that the unclean should be punished, be burnt, be scourged, should suffer the extremity of torture, would not many obey the law? No you will say: for there is appointed, even now, a law forbidding to commit adultery and all do not obey it.

Not because the fear loses its power, but because the greater part expect to be unobserved. So that if when they were on the point of committing an unclean action the legislator and the judge came before them, the fear would be strong enough to cast out the lust. Nay, were I to apply another kind of force inferior to this; were I to take the man and remove him from the beloved person, and shut him up close in chains, he will be able to bear it, without suffering any great harm.

Let us not say then that such an one is by nature evil: for if a man were by nature good, he could never at any time become evil; and if he were by nature evil, he could never be good. But now we see that changes take place rapidly, and that men quickly shift from this side to the other, and from that fall back again into this. And these things we may see not in the Scriptures only, for instance, that publicans have become apostles; and disciples, traitors; and harlots, chaste; and robbers, men of good repute; and magicians have worshipped; and ungodly men passed over unto godliness, both in the New Testament and in the Old; but even every day a man may see many such things occurring.

Now if things were natural, they could not change. For so we, being by nature susceptible, could never by any exertions become void of feeling. For that which is whatever it is by nature, can never fall away from such its natural condition. No one, for example, ever changed from sleeping to not sleeping: no one from a state of corruption unto incorruption: no one from hunger to the perpetual absence of that sensation. Wherefore neither are these things matters of accusation, nor do we reproach ourselves for them; nor ever did any one, meaning to blame another, say to him, O thou, corruptible and subject to passion: but either adultery or fornication, or something of that kind, we always lay to the charge of those who are responsible; and we bring them before judges, who blame and punish, and in the contrary cases award honors.

11. Since then both from our conduct towards one another, and from others' conduct to us when judged, and from the things about which we have written laws, and from the things wherein we condemn ourselves, though there be no one to accuse us; and from the instances of our becoming worse through indolence, and better through fear; and from the cases wherein we see others doing well and arriving at the height of self-command, (φιλοσοφία) it is quite clear that we also have it in our power to do well: why do we, the most part, deceive ourselves in vain with heartless pretexts and excuses, bringing not only no pardon, but even punishment intolerable? When we ought to keep before our eyes that fearful day, and to give heed to virtue; and after a little labor, obtain the incorruptible crowns? For these words will be no defense to us; rather our fellow-servants, and those who have practised the contrary virtues, will condemn all who continue in sin: the cruel man will be condemned by the merciful; the evil, by the good; the fierce, by the gentle; the grudging, by the courteous; the vain-glorious, by the self-denying; the indolent, by the serious; the intemperate, by the sober-minded. Thus will God pass judgment upon us, and will set in their place both companies; on one bestowing praise, on the other punishment. But God forbid that any of those present should be among the punished and dishonored, but rather among those who are crowned and the winners of the kingdom. Which may God grant us all to obtain through the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ; with Whom unto the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, power, honor, now and ever, and unto everlasting ages. Amen.

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